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TABLE of contents

TABLE of contents

The Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography

Why We Love It Here: Exploration of Affection and Attachment in a Brazilian Urban Periphery

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ABSTRACT

This research interprets the marginalized neighborhood of Serrinha as a place in the city of Florianópolis, Brazil, by examining the relations between the physical neighborhood and internal social networks. I use concepts from the anthropology of materiality and an interdisciplinary understanding of place attachment to examine how the social and physical dimensions of place coalesce within Serrinha. I employ data from eight weeks of ethnographic research and Scannell and Gifford's tripartite model of place attachment to frame the everyday experiences and affects of Serrinha residents, especially to illustrate Serrinha outside of the typical stereotypes of favelas. In doing so, the study analyzes the symbolic significance of brick as the material of choice for Serrinha's self-built houses and asserts that the brick is a metaphor for local and global relationships. Ultimately, this research argues that autoconstruction of the house with brick constitutes a significant social and emotional process of attachment in Serrinha.

Keywords: material analysis; place attachment; periphery; identity; autoconstruction

"We have an affection for this place."

-Santi Junior

While Lourenço and I split a beer at the small wooden counter at Bar Rotta, a tiny room converted into a bar on the corner of Serrinha's main road, its owner, Rafael Junior, sat across from us and proudly showed us a video on his phone that he had taken at his house earlier. He had been standing atop the half-built floor that would soon be his home (the third floor of the house), horizontally videotaping the view he would have from his window. It was a 180° view of the city of Florianópolis, from the northwestern to the southwestern coast of the island. Rafael Junior considers his house to be the greatest location in Serrinha and stated that even if a buyer were to offer US$3M for it, a reasonable price for which a house with a similar view may sell for in the United States, he would never sell, even though the average price of a Serrinha home is around US$2,200 (Infosolo 2006 as cited in Lonardoni 2007, 56). Because once he finishes constructing the floor, he will finally be able to have his own space away from his mother and sister, with whom he shares the house. His living there is indefinite; he refuses to move to the nicer neighborhood on the North of the island where his girlfriend lives, especially due to the connection he has with his house and family. In the future, Rafael Junior is committed to raising his family in Serrinha.

For this article, I draw heavily from the concept of place attachment to understand the *favela* of Serrinha and how social networks and systems are linked to the physicality of the favela. (*Favela* is a Brazilian term that is best translated to 'slum' in English; I further explain the term in the next section.) In addition, I borrow notions from the anthropology of materiality—a subfield conceptualizing the reciprocal interactions between people and material—to explore brick as a metaphor for social relations. Building on this approach, I argue that the brick as a material comprises social meaning, and I assert that the house—not the neighborhood—is the significant range of attachment in Serrinha. This is especially true because Serrinha homes are autoconstructed, which is the foundation for many favela neighborhoods (Caldeira 2012, 387) and one of the key differences between homes in favela and non-favela neighborhoods. Brazilian-American anthropologist Teresa Caldeira (2012) explains that "an autoconstructed house is always something in the making…improved and extended step by step over many decades, depending on the family resources" (387). In other words, residents use their own resources to gather materials, space, and build their home. This is not a one-and-done process; there is generally always a sense of change or improvement as residents construct more rooms, swap out materials, or remodel as their financial or social positions evolve. This means residents have self-built their homes over time and in the process have integrated social relationships of attachment and kinship into the physical house. To demonstrate the interactions between autoconstruction, place attachment, and material in Serrinha, I first provide conceptual contexts for urban spaces and favelas before introducing my ethnographic findings. My findings suggest that in Serrinha, residents are deeply connected to and identified by their physical homes, particularly because the house symbolizes the process of building a family, tight social network, and identity. The choice of material for the house is also salient, as the difference between brick and wood Serrinha houses points towards broader social exclusions that follow lines of racial and class discrimination.

Conceptual Framework

The Urban Favela

Uneven urban development has divided many city geographies into the "center" and the "periphery." The term *center* refers to both a literal geographic location and to a centralization of wealth and power regarded as legitimate and formal. Formal in this sense signifies a lifestyle in which there is "regularity of its order, a predictable rhythm and sense of control that we often take for granted" (Hann and Hart 2011, 114). In contrast, *periphery* refers to the informal spatial fringes surrounding the center and their corresponding exclusion from wealth, power, and regularity.

The informality of urban peripheries in the Global South has historically referred to the illegal and thus, undocumented, construction of self-built houses wherever there is physical space (see Figure 1), complicating land ownership and related issues (Perlman 2010, 296). Where these types of houses congregate become areas of insecure housing with a general lack of formal infrastructure and difficult access to social resources (Pequeno 2008). Around the world these areas are studied as slums, but specifically known in Brazil as *favelas*.

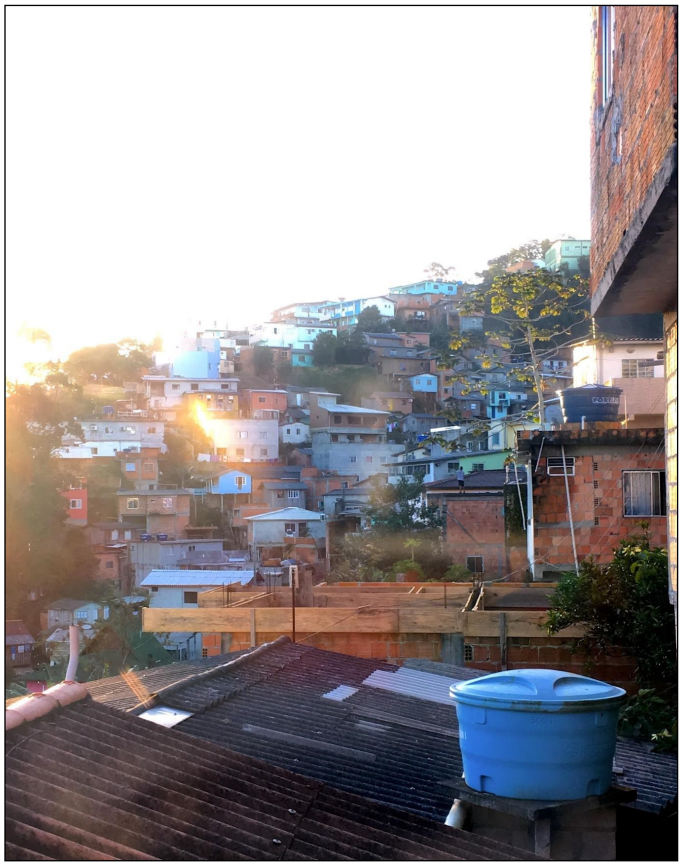

Figure 1: View from Serrinha of houses packed onto a hillside in a neighboring favela, Caeira. Photo by author, June 2019.

Brazilian scholar Beatriz Jaguaribe (2004) provides a succinct history of the *favela*:

> The word favela designates the slum areas without basic sanitation and infrastructure that exist in almost all the cities of Brazil. The origins of the term favela began in the late nineteenth century when homeless soldiers returned from the backlands of Bahia after having exterminated the messianic rebel uprising of Canudos. While fighting in Canudos, the soldiers had camped on a hill covered by vegetation known as "favela." Upon returning to Rio de Janeiro, the soldiers never received the promised government housing and built makeshift shacks on a hill near the centre of Rio. They named their location Favela in a clear reference to Canudos. According to the 2000 census undertaken by the IBGE, favela populations have increased throughout Brazil. In a city such as Rio de Janeiro, the favela population increases in one year what the urbanized city population increases in six. (339)

With the abolition of slavery and the intensification of rural to urban migration during the 1900s, migrants moved into cities (Perlman 2010, 26-8) where neither the landscapes nor governing bodies were prepared for the influx. Migrants with very few assets flooded the urban peripheries of central and southern Brazilian states, moving in where they had connections: "in many cases, new residents found people that had came [*sic*] from their same place of origin, and those networks provided some sort of initial support and opportunity" (Benmergui 2012, 45). In contrast, formal systems discriminate against periphery residents, who "face overt discrimination on the basis of their address, particularly if settlements are stigmatized by high levels of gun and/or drug crime, and are often unable to provide employers with a formal address because of the informal/illegal nature of their residence" (Grant 2010, 9). Favela residents, therefore, have costly and external barriers to entry into labor markets, leading to the cyclical geographic concentration of "socioeconomic and political exclusion on the basis of…identity" (9). This place-based identity is linked to other identities. For example, favelas are more or less synonymous with Afro-Brazilians—in Rio de Janeiro, sixty percent of favela residents were recorded to belong to that racial identity (Saenz 2015). Therefore, though distinctions between a center and periphery are visible in every city's physical landscape, the processes that place and maintain the divisions between the two areas are human-made and social.

A wide range of ethnographies detail life in favelas and provide a way to contextualize Serrinha, the favela of interest in this study. Carolina Maria de Jesus' diary turned groundbreaking emic ethnography of life in a São Paulo favela

adds detail to the favela experience. She notes general insecurities, violence, poverty, and drugs in her favela; however, she also describes interactions among neighbors that can be interpreted as strong adherence to the community despite these challenges (de Jesus 1962). Janice Perlman's (2010) highly regarded ethnographic work spanning over forty years of extensive research, *Favela*, is also critical for contextualizing favelas. Though Perlman notes what ethnographies like de Jesus's observe, she more importantly fights the "shock of the real" lens that the media has used to portray favelas. This refers to a concept that Jaguaribe (2005) has used to describe how the media has represented favelas through exhibiting violent occurrences as the quotidian. For example, the lens is employed in movies such as *City of God*, whose directors portray extreme and frequent drug-related crime in the favela. Perlman (2010), in contrast to popular portrayal, emphasizes the agency and optimism of favela residents within their "hostile environment" by displaying their talents and assets. She lays out the divisions within her favelas of study and counters the typical representation, even describing residents' attachment to their neighborhoods (235). The reality of everyday life in Serrinha certainly reflects many of the characteristics typical to favelas but, as Perlman's work suggests, it is also not one-dimensional.

Locating the Serrinha Favela

Stark differences in city landscapes are not unique only to infamously unequal cities like Rio de Janeiro. Florianópolis, the capital of the southern Brazilian state of Santa Catarina, ranks as the third most developed city in Brazil (Atlas of Human Development 2010). Yet, the municipality is no exception from the presence of these informal, low-income favelas. In 2010,

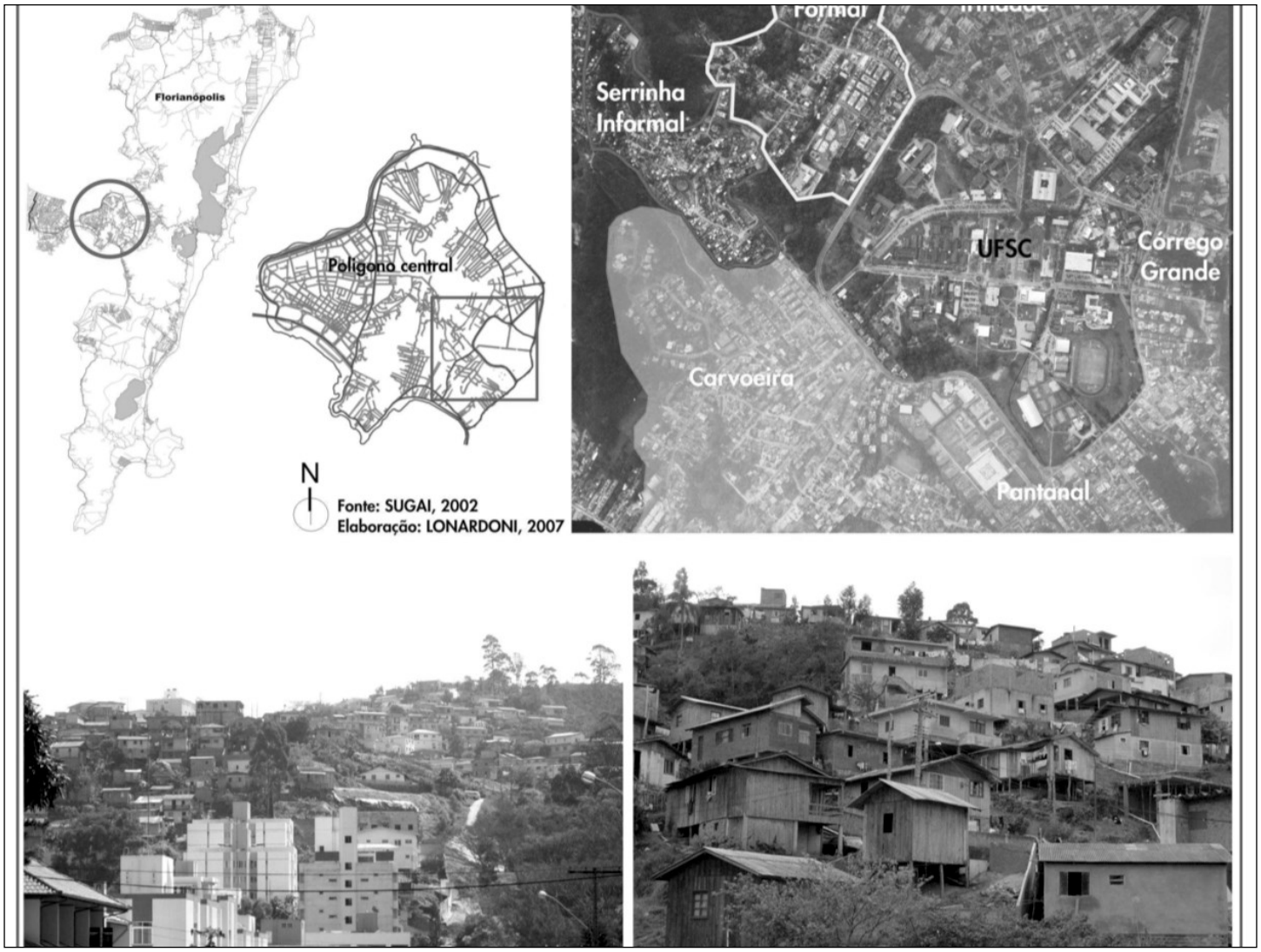

Figure 2: Greyscaled map and images depicting the location and make-up of Serrinha ("Serrinha Informal" in the top right map). Original source: Lonardoni 2007, 64.

the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística census counted 421,240 citizens for the municipality of Florianópolis. A study in 2008 recorded around 51,600 Florianópolis citizens living in favela areas (Sampaio et al. 2013, 33) across 61 favelas throughout the municipality (Lonardoni 2007, 44), making the favela population over 12% of the total municipality population. Of this population, 37% live in the Maciço Central do Morro da Cruz area, where Serrinha can be found. Geographically, Serrinha is located at the periphery of neighborhoods that are primarily associated with the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) and its students (see Figure 2). Serrinha is interesting in that it is broken into a formal and informal section (Voltolini 2003, 42) (see top right of Figure 2). This simply means that there are legal homes and tall apartment complexes at the bottom of the steep hill near UFSC (Sampaio et al. 2013, 35); the higher one travels up the hill to enter informal Serrinha, the more precarious and autoconstructed the houses become (Sugai 2009, 170).

Serrinha's existence is rooted in waves of rural-urban migration to Florianópolis during the 1980s—migrants generally coming from the countryside of Santa Catarina and later from northeastern states such as Bahia (Inês, personal communication; Renata, personal communication). The poorest and blackest region in the nation (Chepkemoi 2017; IBGE 2015, 12), the northeast is discriminated against in public rhetoric, with migrants from the area derogatorily labeled *baianos* (Carvalho and Fonseca 2018, 7). Serrinha was initially attractive to migrants due to its location in relation to the formal sector (O Centro and UFSC neighborhoods) and its affordability (Lonardoni 2007, 71). However, as the community grew, so did social stigma surrounding it; in 1990, the military police invaded Serrinha with the intent to take down the self-constructed homes, but residents' physical protest stopped them (Lonardoni 2007, 78).

Today, the shortest way to get from O Centro to UFSC is by driving up one side of Maciço Central do Morro da Cruz, the hill upon which Serrinha sits, and down the other side on the main neighborhood road, the Transcaeira. Because of the Transcaeira and Serrinha's location, the area is served by the public bus system and is thus not completely cut out from that aspect of public services. However, though Serrinha residents may now use the bus system to travel into Trindade and O Centro, they do so to access basic necessities that are only available in the formal areas or their working class jobs in cleaning and manual labor (Lonardoni 2007, 78). Serrinha residents have criticized the road as "serving only as a connection between two important sides of the formal city...and in general only the population that does not reside in Serrinha" (translated from Sampaio et al. 2013, 46). This illustrates how patterns of "integration and exclusion" (Penglase 2008, 121) of neighborhoods are self-perpetuating and inseparable. Furthermore, it illustrates that Serrinha residents identify Serrinha as a place of exclusion, recognizing the distinction between their geographic and social position and the normative city.

Methodology

When I studied abroad at UFSC in 2018, I was aware of Serrinha, the favela closest to the university, but never interacted with the neighborhood. Wanting to analyze both the neighborhood and the social factors behind the separation between the formal city (places like UFSC) and informal peripheries, I returned in June and July 2019 to conduct research in Serrinha. My research employs ethnographic methods such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and discourse analysis. To document my participant observation experiences in Serrinha, I took notes and photographs of public neighborhood spaces (see Figure 3). Additionally, I sketched a rough map of the space as I began experiencing it to provide more illustration (see Figure 4). These methods aid in capturing the emic perspective of place.

My first contact in the neighborhood was a newly-immigrated Serrinha resident around my age, Lourenço. My first significant observations took place as I tagged along with him. I eventually began volunteering in an important neighborhood NGO, Casa São José, an institution providing extra guidance for students during the hours of the day that school is not in session. There, I furthered my

participation in the neighborhood; Casa São José allowed my entrance into the community's trust as I worked with neighborhood children and became known to parents through their kids. As I accompanied Lourenço in his daily life throughout the neighborhood and city, we met new participants for semi-structured interviews at various social sites. These sites varied and included places from a neighborhood thrift store, living rooms of participants, to on the street.

At these sites, I employed the method of snowball sampling to procure more participants. All participants were recruited voluntarily, and though not chosen based on demographic criteria such as race or gender, these markers were noted. Because I had lived in the formal neighborhood of Trindade with a family during my 2018 study abroad, I was also able to reach out and converse with my old host sister and mother, who helped vocalize the etic perspective—in this case, of non-Serrinha residents. Over the course of two months, I conducted fourteen semi-structured conversations in Portuguese with twenty participants ranging from twenty to sixty years of age and varying in race and gender. All were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

My questions for the interviews were built upon two separate community-asset research experiences, from which I took and adapted questions. I asked questions such as: *What in your community are you proud of? Where is your favorite place in the neighborhood? In Florianópolis? Describe your relationship with your neighbors*. I was attuned to how the respondents described physical infrastructure, social relations, and how they located Serrinha within the social and physical geography of the broader city. These types of questions not only

Figure 3: Sunset over the normative city, seen from the bend of Rua Marcus Aurélio Homem, the main road of Serrinha. Photo by author, June 2019.

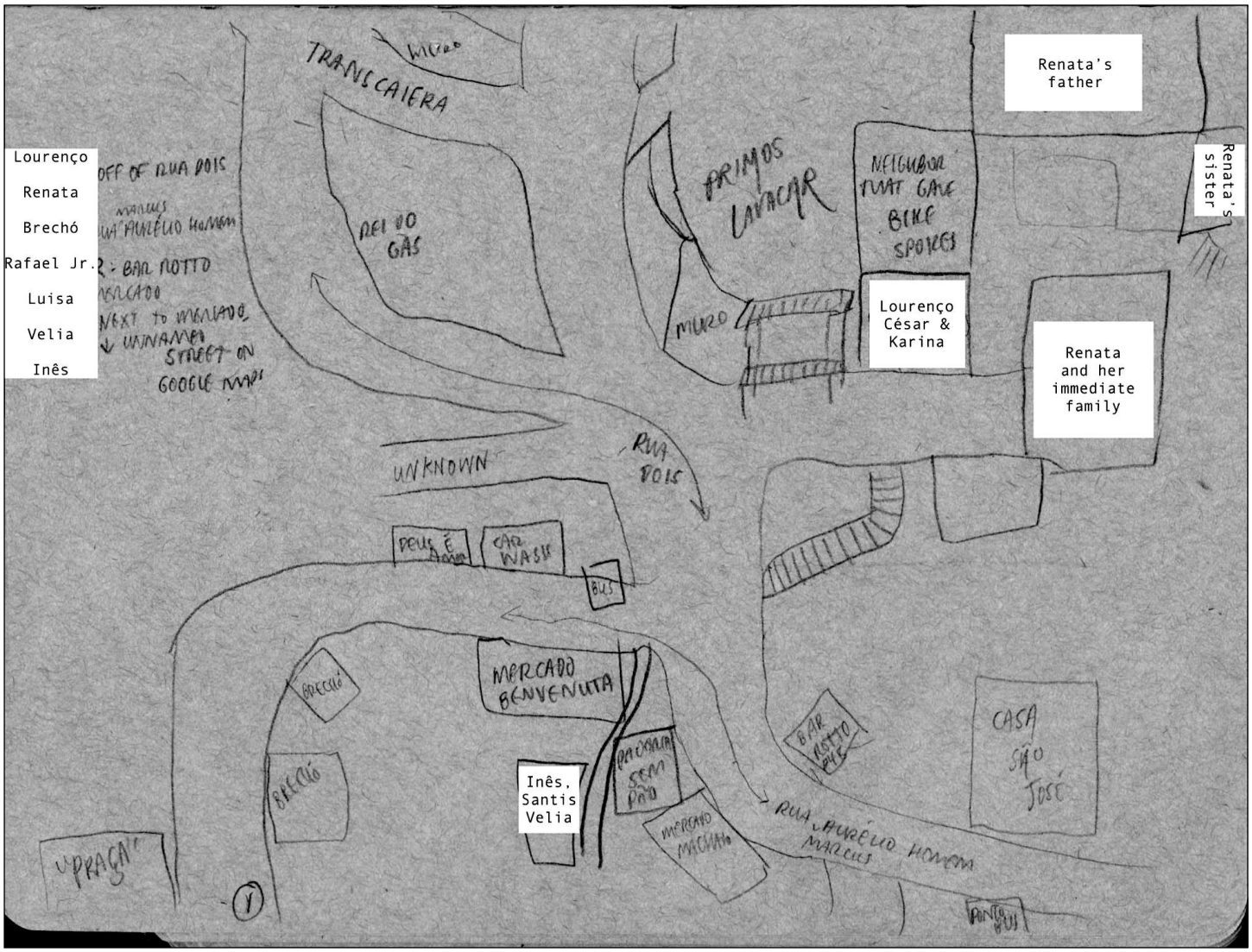

Figure 4: Rough, incomplete map created during first days of fieldwork. Location labels edited to protect participants' names. Map by author, June 2019.

encouraged answers about community identity, but also prompted informants to discuss the ways in which physical sites are constructed to reflect social realities. I used discourse analysis to examine responses and participants' implicit attitudes, for example, when interpreting why a participant may use non-derogatory terms to describe their circle within the neighborhood, but racially derogatory terms to describe other residents.

Space, Place, and Related Concepts

To explore the internalization of urban separations into place attachment, it is necessary to abstract the notion of space from that of place. This is done well in the field of urban anthropology, whose recent research trends have condensed around the "symbolic and social production studies of urban space" (Low 1996, 402) and theorizations of space and place (Low 2009, 22). Anthropologists Gupta and Ferguson (1997) delineate these notions of space and place:

> By always foregrounding the spatial distribution of hierarchical power relations, we can better understand the processes whereby a space achieves a distinctive identity as a place. Keeping in mind that notions of locality or community refer both to a demarcated physical space and to clusters of interaction, we can see that the identity of a place emerges by the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultural construction as a community or locality. (36)

In other words, a place is artificially derived from a spatial landscape through social and cultural processes. This speaks to the

anthropological concept of "representational cities," a term that argues that the built environment of the city is a text and history to be read (Low 1996, 386). The creation of places from space is never completely removable from deeper social meanings, processes, and networks (Forrest and Kearns 2001; Soja 1980), as demonstrated in scholars' exploration of urban favelas.

Urban anthropologists have created terms that further explore place. One such term is place attachment (Altman and Low 1992), which describes the emotional, "affective relationship" (Marzano 2015, 42) that people have to place. Social anthropologist Gilberto Marzano breaks down Scannell and Gifford's (2010) popular tripartite model of place attachment into three dimensions: "*the actor dimension* that represents who is attached…*the psychological process* through which affect, cognition and behavior occur in the attachment…[and] *the object of the attachment*, the place, including its social and physical characteristics" (Marzano 2015, 45). In Serrinha, I argue that the basis of place attachment is cemented in, based on, and related to the house and the brick that makes it. The process and reasoning behind physical construction, including choice of material, cannot be understood as another layer separate from the social, as it ultimately symbolizes the social. As residents build their experiences and relationships into their homes (a "psychological process"), the bricks and buildings (the "objects of attachment") become a synecdoche for the social and familial relations connected (the "actor dimension") to Serrinha and the houses.

Previous studies find that the social dimension is normally emphasized more heavily than the physical in the formation of place attachment (Hidalgo and Hernández 2001, 275). In their seminal work, Hidalgo and Hernández find that in this social aspect, the house is the most significant object or range of attachment (278); their findings differ from other works that have framed the neighborhood as the range of attachment that is most significant for place attachment (273). More research is needed to expand on Hidalgo and Hernández's findings to understand the "significant ranges for place attachment," as well as to address the "gap regarding…spatial environments…and whether the neighbourhood range is effectively the basic level of attachment, as many studies assume" (Hidalgo and Hernández 2001, 273). To contribute to this literature, I apply the anthropology of materiality to the Serrinha brick to assert that the basic level of attachment in Serrinha is the individual house rather than the neighborhood itself.

Of course, people attach personal sentiment to their homes in any neighborhood. Like Dona and Dafne, my old host mother and sister living in Trindade, who feel little connection to the neighborhood but much attachment to the modern apartment they have called home for over twenty years. What distinguishes self-made Serrinha houses from apartments like theirs and gives them significance is that they are autoconstructed. Autoconstruction of homes can cause issues in internal and external relationships (namely legal ones), but also creates an object of attachment for residents that has a deep personal and social significance, especially in favelas such as Serrinha. My ethnographic findings walk through the typical Serrinha house, social networks, and how place attachment is formed in Serrinha. Ultimately, as residents build their homes on Serrinha soil, they ironically "ground the very social order that exploits them" (Holston 1991, 448) by finalizing, in a way, their attachment to and identification with the neighborhood.

Findings

Family, House, and Metaphor

The best understanding of belonging, social relations, and identity in Serrinha comes from analyzing the physical house. A participant in D'Avella's (2014) ethnography on the symbolism of bricks stated that "'a house, maybe sometimes it's going to be worth more, maybe sometimes it's going to be worth less, but it's yours'" (188). So, even over a theoretical US$3M dollars, Rafael Junior's ownership and the cost he paid in sweat to build the house reigns dominant. His story shows us that in the end, a house is not a purely physical structure, but one built from intangible and non-fungible valuations.

A much clearer explanation begins by borrowing the words of anthropologist Kristin

Skrabut (2018): houses "[materialize] domestic aspirations and kinship strategies" (271) and "are important relational resources that allow people to maintain ties across generations and accumulate extended kin" (278). Most of my interviewees testified to this either by word or through the example of their house. Ana, for example, moved from Saco de Limões (a middle-class, nicer neighborhood) to Serrinha when she got pregnant with Laura, her first child with Tiago. At that point, Ana and Tiago were not married. Though Tiago had grown up in Serrinha and Ana had not, she left everything to come live with him and start their immediate family.

She and Tiago moved into a small house and continued to build onto it. Perfectly metaphorical, the number of rooms in the house grew as the family did when Ana and Tiago added a child or welcomed extended kin to live with them. Ana described that her house has three bedrooms: one for her and Tiago and one for each of the two kids. Now, Serrinha's meaning for Ana is as "her neighborhood, her house, her place." They wanted to expand the house since their niece was living with them and they felt the need to grow, like Skrabut (2018) described happening in Peruvian low-income areas. Now that Tiago and Ana have saved some money, they are planning to build a new unit on top of their current house and then rent out the bottom level where they currently live. The house will grow as their saved wealth increases, and Tiago and Ana will symbolically and literally move upwards. Tiago's dream is to save up enough money to buy a house in a middle-class neighborhood like Saco de Limões, where Ana lived, but will settle for improvements on their house within Serrinha in the meantime.

Nevertheless, it is not only familial kinship that is encompassed in the physical house, but also social networks in general. Giovanni is the godfather to Ana and Tiago's youngest child, and because he keyed into the house during the recorded interview and sat down in comfort, it was easy to tell he was close to the family. I asked how they all had met and how they entrusted Giovanni to be the godfather of their child. Ana simply responded that he lived a few houses away, so they had met and trusted him. He is now quite a part of their family—he eats meals and runs errands with the family and even takes naps in Ana and Tiago's living room—furthering the "kinship strategy" metaphor of houses. As Giovanni integrates himself into the physical house, he becomes a part of the family's safety net—Giovanni takes care of the kids on occasion, even buying clothes and supplies for them. Ana and Tiago, by welcoming Giovanni into their house, have expanded their kinship network and have consequently obtained extra security for their children.

Many of my friends moved to Serrinha for a similar reason to Ana—family. Lourenço moved to Serrinha because César invited him to, and César moved in because his sister, Karina, had invited him to. Velia, Inês, and Luisa all married into families that had physical and social connections in Serrinha, so they moved into the neighborhood to be with their families. All the while, their families had been constructing and adding onto existing houses to accommodate them. In this sense, Velia and Inês' house is particularly interesting. Inês and Velia are sisters-in-law, married to a pair of brothers. Inês and her husband, Santi Senior, moved to the neighborhood before Velia, due to Santi Senior's connections in Serrinha. Inês and Santi Senior built their house and built Velia's right next to theirs as well, which today can be found next to Mercado Benvenuta (bottom left to center in Figure 4). Their home is "complete," with a cement layer over the raw brick that many other Serrinha houses never covered. The houses even have a gated, cemented outside area (though very narrow) that both separates them from the side street and unifies the two houses into one unit.

Movement between Velia and Inês' homes is completely fluid, especially due to this outside area and Velia's young children, who run in the tiny alley between the two houses screaming, weaving in and out of the rooms of the two houses, back and forth and back and forth. They force the households together. Velia uses this proximity as well. She often pops into Inês' living room looking to borrow kitchen supplies, which Inês always allows, never getting up since Velia comfortably navigates Inês' kitchen and takes what she needs. They are two sisters-in-law and two brothers whose families are encompassed in two physical houses right next

to each other, connected symbolically and physically into an extended family unit.

In the end, it is always about the house and the family, more so than the neighborhood. The house is the primary object of place attachment. Why would Rafael Junior not leave Serrinha? Because he "needs his family" and "has stability" in the neighborhood. I am not sure if he was speaking about stability in regards to family or his house, but in the end they are one and the same. Family, house, stability. Friendly Maura, who loves Serrinha equally as much as Rafael Junior, even to the point of defensiveness, would leave the community for personal house needs. She explains that her house is becoming too small; she wants to garden more but has no outside space, as her house is right next to Rua Marcus Aurélio Homem. Though Maura has lived in Serrinha since birth and has friends there that are like siblings, leaving the neighborhood would not upset her if it meant moving into a bigger house (Maura, personal communication). Ultimately, place attachment can manifest anywhere because it is rooted in the house rather than the neighborhood itself.

On Knowing and Being Known

Being raised in Ohio, I arrived to the Florianópolis winter armed with overconfidence in my ability to handle cold. After several nights spent shivering in my bed, I scoured Serrinha for a *brechó* (thrift shop) where I could buy a cheap sweatshirt. Always guided by luck, the three women I approached on the street happened to own a local *brechó*, a small, yellow cement building on the turn of Rua Marcus Aurélio Homem (see Figure 5). Upon describing my needs, the women directed me to a *brechó* owned by their friend next door and encouraged me to buy from Mona instead as her clothes were cheaper. Mona introduced herself, describing her relationship with Serrinha as I picked through her hoodies. Finding one that I liked, I pulled out my card to pay and Mona ushered me next door to use their card machine, leaving her other customers completely unattended and her shop door wide open. The card machine could not be found, and Mona turned to me with a smile and pushed my card away from her, telling me to come back another day to pay.

Figure 5: Bruna and Stefania's thrift store on the turn of Rua Marcus Aurélio Homem. Mona's is down the street to the right, not pictured. Photo by author, July 2019.

Not only did Bruna and Stefania unhesitatingly and non-competitively support Mona's business, but Mona extended a generous offer of trust to a stranger in addition to other customers. There was trust that I would return another day to pay for a good and trust of other residents in the neighborhood not to steal or wreck the store while unattended. This network of trust becomes daily habits that do not manifest as easily in other neighborhoods near UFSC. Of course, the informal nature of life in Serrinha is a possibility for the why, and this system of trust extends even to the most important issues within the neighborhood—land ownership.

Renata explained the process of selling and buying houses to me: in Serrinha, the ownership of land plots is implicitly known by most neighborhood residents, though it is often not legalized or recognized by the municipality. Therefore, the sale of a house in Serrinha or transfer of land ownership can generally only be notarized at most. With no real claim to land if ever there were to be a dispute over it, the transaction is valued at the level of trust between buyer and seller.

Economic anthropologist Bill Maurer (2006) explains this development: "states create value by the strength of their word and markets create value through substantial exchange" (27). In Serrinha's case, residents act as the state and as the market to create value. That is not to say that money or currency is not relevant, but in Serrinha, the non-money layer of exchange is most emphasized. In the absence of the

normative state to validate, legalize, or back up transactions, something else must be offered up as assurance. Mauss speaks of this in *The Gift* with his theory of gift exchange, the idea that social implications and relationships are the impulse behind economic transactions. In Serrinha, one's social reputation, one's well-being, one's reward for years of investing in "becoming known" within the community are all put on the line as the collateral behind Serrinha contracts. This speaks to the lack of state protection within Serrinha and also accentuates the significance of one's social relationships in the set-up and maintenance of the neighborhood.

In Serrinha, knowing others is the greatest asset one could have. Your neighbors are literally family, you know everyone, you smile at the people you pass every day, and you extend that trust to others that are known in Serrinha, even if the recipient is a Korean-American girl. This begs the question: how do you become known within Serrinha? I became known as an extension of Lourenço, who is seen as a resident of Serrinha. A better question is how Lucas, the owner of a neighborhood market, became known. He does not live in Serrinha but in a nicer neighborhood called Agronômica, and people know this. Yet he can be seen at the market every day, working the cash register and making small talk with all customers that walk into the store on their way home. Though not a resident, he is effectively known and embraced in the community. Lucas also reflected that he feels safe and respected in Serrinha; after our interview, he even extended the goodwill of the Serrinha community to me: "if you need anything, *we* are here."

Lucas owns a brick-and-mortar store that frames social interactions between him and Serrinha residents. People have attached Lucas's identity to the store and, since the store is in Serrinha, they transitively link Lucas to Serrinha and thus welcome him in the neighborhood. Present in this is the "psychological process" during which actors attach meaning and togetherness to another actor through an "object of attachment"—the store. Thus, in Serrinha, place attachment and the relationships people have or build are visible in physical buildings.

The Brick as Metaphor

For the two months that I stayed in Florianópolis in the summer of 2019, Renata and her family worked every single day on their house. The sounds of hammering, sawing, and men chattering filled the background of afternoons Lourenço and I spent cooking and eating in front of his house. Renata's house got bigger and bigger as we lazed around. Bricks were taken from the huge pile that had been transported to sit in the lot next to Lourenço's house and laid atop of each other precisely. Renata's house has the look of a complete, permanent favela home with cement over the brick; likewise, all the houses in formal neighborhoods have the brick covered in a layer of cement, though usually brighter and much neater. By the time I left, the additional floor was almost done, adding more space for Renata and her big family (see Figure 6)—

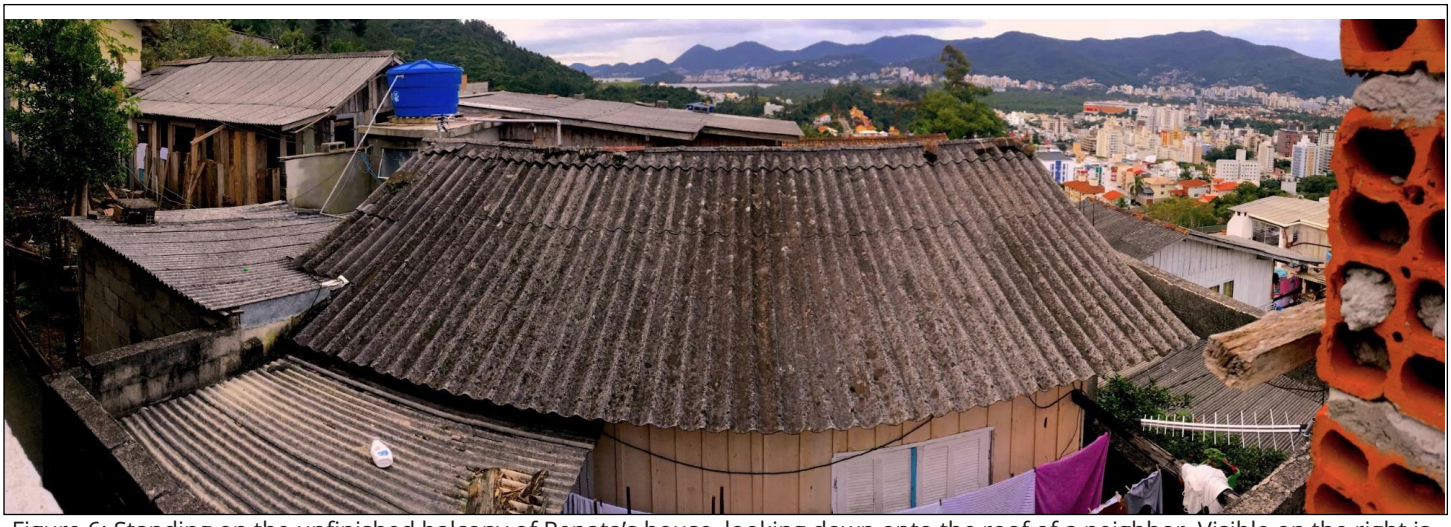

Figure 6: Standing on the unfinished balcony of Renata's house, looking down onto the roof of a neighbor. Visible on the right is the brick generally used in construction of houses. Photo by author, June 2019.

downstairs, her self-owned thrift store and rooms for rent.

Renata was achieving the next step, so to speak, for her Serrinha house and social evolution. And she did it herself, or at least with only the help of her family. Laying each brick is both a physical and psychological process. Actors work and sweat to improve their houses not necessarily for a better view, but to regard themselves as better off than they were in the past. The brick signifies unlimited advancement and potential energy for expansion. If the three little pigs taught us anything, it is that brick is better than wood. In Serrinha, this could not be more true: brick means permanence and stability, and therefore more claim to Serrinha as part of one's identity. It is important that the house is autoconstructed, and it is more significant that the house is autoconstructed by brick.

When a brick house is put together, the constructed house is the becoming or manifestation of social and familial relations. "In the act of production" the Serrinha person that autoconstructs their house "couples his own movements and gestures—indeed, his very life—with the becoming of his materials, joining with and following the forces and flows that bring his work to fruition" (Ingold 2012, 435). Brick houses give the actor the ability to quite literally write their personal text. No brick is put down randomly, as theory within the anthropology of materiality suggests: "Human history has fundamentally to be understood as an ongoing process of objectification. In this, people create a material world that, in turn, provides a mirror in the reflection of which they and their successors fashion themselves" (Ingold 2012, 435). Hence, in Serrinha, why a house of brick? Brick is cheap, but sturdy. Brick can be bought and used in small increments, signifying the continuous process of autoconstruction. But what does the choice of brick mean (keeping in mind that the houses of newcomers, otherwise known as the "outsiders" or *baianos*, are autoconstructed from wood)?

Bricks connect discussions of the dynamism of materials to the symbolism of the physical Serrinha house. Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2012) explains the meaning of material:

> To understand materials is to be able to tell their histories—of what they do and what happens to them when treated in particular ways—in the very practice of working with them. Materials do not exist as static entities with diagnostic attributes…'Matter is always already an ongoing historicity.' Materials, thus, carry on, undergoing continual modulation as they do so. In the phenomenal world, every material is a becoming. In this sense, we can agree with Deleuze and Guattari (2004) that materials evince a 'life proper to matter,' albeit one that is hidden or rendered unrecognizable by the terms of the hylomorphic model, which reduce matter to inert substance. (434)

Without actors to give meaning to brick, bricks are just inert blocks of clay and earth, as Ingold explained. However, even this is analogous. As earth, bricks are "lower cost" since there is "no shortage of raw material" (Frayssinet 2010); they are symbolically comparable to those who live in a favela, the class that provides no shortage of workers for lower-paying jobs. Made of clay and earth, there is a sense of rawness and humility in the material of bricks, especially when uncovered, as many Serrinha houses are. For a neighborhood that was created as its residents cut greenery and leveled ground, a neighborhood that ultimately has a complicated relationship with land and earth, bricks seem ironically fitting.

Employing this symbolic perspective, the brick in Serrinha must be seen as a metaphor for Serrinha. The brick is where the larger history, economic context, migratory movements, and invisible hierarchies that place people in Serrinha become tangible and actualized.

Fragmented Community

Only a few decades ago, Serrinha was covered with green bush, and remembering the days of green is a testament to one's belonging and pride. Remembering means one is an "original" or of the first wave that settled Serrinha, originating mainly from whiter southern states. Not being an original means one is either not a Serrinha resident or is an "outsider," someone who has migrated in from a northern state and is consequently seen as destructive, violent, and dirty by some originals (Renata, personal

communication; Rafael Junior, personal communication; Tiago, personal communication). The clearest claim to being an original is in the location and material of the house. When one's house is made of brick and on the main road, it shows the roots one has in Serrinha and the meaning of the place to one's family. These are points that I have clarified in this article that demonstrate the connection between broader social relations, place attachment, and the house.

Serrinha is the actualization of racialized violence and larger hierarchies. One great illustration of this is Renata, who gatekeeps Serrinha—she refuses to rent her kitnets to *baianos*, or those who have an accent from the northeastern region, replicating global patterns of racial and economic exclusion and discrimination. Anthropologists Hann and Hart (2011) describe this: "The historical relationship between the peoples of rich and poor countries is one of movement in both directions…Keeping high- and low-wage labour streams apart through systematic racial discrimination has been elevated to a universal principle of world society, replicated at all levels more or less overtly" (118-9), which Renata unwittingly replicates in Serrinha.

The capitalist-motivated racism and movements—the slave trade from Africa into the north of Brazil— that have shaped the world economy are replicated from a global scale to the Brazilian scale, to the Florianópolis scale, and to the Serrinha scale. Migration from the northern parts of Brazil to the south is still common (again, many Serrinha residents come from Bahia), and these migrants generally end up in favelas like Serrinha within the city. Then, even within Serrinha, they face discrimination in finding housing and being wholly accepted into the community (as Renata's example shows), which can be interpreted as a replication of global processes. The outsiders live on the outskirts in houses made of wood planks (see Figure 7), whereas the originals live in brick houses and can even, in Renata's case, build rooms to rent at her discretion. So, Renata's identity resulting from being an original of Serrinha "built on territorial segmentation and regulation of movement across borders, justifies the unfair treatment of non-citizens and makes people blind to the common interests of humanity" (Hann and Hart 2011, 118). Through maintaining systems of discrimination and segregation that begin on a large scale and trickle down into the brick and wood of Serrinha houses, unification of the community is forgotten. In this way, brick is a metaphor for worldwide processes and hierarchies.

Affection for the Place

One of the walls of Renata's house is riddled with bullet holes, and an era of violence can be read or extrapolated from the physical state of the wall. But when Renata describes this wall, she speaks with an emphasis not on acts of violence, but with a sense of pride in and gratitude toward the house that successfully protected her and her family. She explains the exodus of residents that left during the "era of slaughter," and in this narrative is an implication of pride that she has stuck it out and stayed here at her roots. Like many other residents I interviewed, Renata cannot possibly imagine leaving the neighborhood. Luisa and Rafael Jr. want to raise their respective kids in the neighborhood, going so far as to turn down opportunities to move elsewhere. Even Inês, who does not always feel safe in Serrinha, says "[she] could never see herself living in another neighborhood."

The reasons Serrinha residents love the neighborhood and would not move away are socially based, as place attachment literature might suggest. There is comfort in friendship and in living right next to your whole family. Neighbors have been raised together since birth, and one is always recognized through an epithet of relation—Laura is known "not as Laura but as ahh, the daughter of Tiago"; Tiago is known by his childhood in Serrinha and his role in the Residents' Association. Not only familial relations but also old friendships guarantee one's survival and safety. People are able to knock on the doors of neighbors when they "need something, and [neighbors] are always ready to give…their friendship, something. Willingly" (Renata, personal communication). It is because of this that Rafael Jr. also loves Serrinha—"people here are very humble"—like the common Brazilian appellation of *humble people* for those that live in favelas might suggest. Stefania amalgamates

Figure 7: View of the kitchen in a self-constructed wooden Serrinha house on the outskirts of the community. Photo by author, June 2019.

all these feelings for why she feels an attachment to the community: "it's as if it were a family."

In stark contrast is the experience of living in a formal neighborhood. Neither Dona nor Dafne go beyond the basic wave-and-greet for those even living on the same floor of their apartment in Trindade. Dona, Dafne, and their neighbors use their homes as a source of isolation and boundaries, quickly keying in after hellos and shutting their front doors. In Serrinha, hangouts bleed into the street and people move effortlessly in a flow of talk, moving from street to bar, bar to house, house to street. Always encompassed by the physical frame of a home or building, Serrinha residents interact and build affection to one another, welcomingly leaving their doors open for friends and neighbors.

Conclusion

After creation, Serrinha stayed divided from the formal city of Florianópolis through complicated social relations. Generally, tools like stigma and hyper-shocking media have created a negative image of favelas like Serrinha. But, though there are typical favela markers within the community, residents of Serrinha largely like Serrinha. Most participants mentioned their connections to friends, family, and their home as the basis for this liking and for their connection to the neighborhood. It is important to explore these elements of place attachment present in Serrinha, as it facilitates the use of a lens different than the typical, one that neither fully romanticizes Serrinha nor paints Serrinha as a shock of the real place.

In agreement with the trends in past literature illustrated by Hidalgo and Hernández (2001), the social dimension in Serrinha is emphasized more directly than the physical in the neighborhood's place attachment, since most participants overwhelmingly noted varying kinship relationships in their comprehension of Serrinha. Being known and utilizing the value that comes from it is an essential component of living in Serrinha. Residents use these social strategies and build them into their homes, developing their networks and their affection for place. These networks are made into text by the writing of one's house and family story in brick, so the physical and social dimensions of attachment are inextricably linked.

As noted earlier, bricks and their permanence consummate and "ground the very social order that exploits" (Holston 1991, 448) the Serrinha resident. In the act of laying bricks for their home, residents unwittingly accept these forces and become a part of these greater patterns of exploitation by solidifying their presence in and identity with the periphery, especially by autoconstructing their house, which further entrenches Serrinha in the favela category. The brick is the physical manifestation and foundation of all place and place attachment, literally and metaphorically. As the notion of autoconstruction indicates, the ongoing, continual becoming of the neighborhood is like "the globe itself…an invention…its reality is under construction" (Latour 2004 as cited in D'Avella 2014, 175). Interpreting the physical make-up of the houses in Serrinha is to also understand the social stories of the neighborhood, like familial or kinship relations between owners of houses (D'Avella 2014, 175), which would otherwise be invisible unless talking to home owners—recall the gated front yard of Velia and Inês, who we would not know were related simply by walking past their homes. Likewise, D'Avella (2014) argues that material ceases to have meaning without "their relations…with those who have them" (175). This is the case for Renata's bullet wall, which takes life as a protector and source of safety, and evidences a time of dueling drug factions that has no written history.

Autoconstruction is crucial in Serrinha, as it is in most favelas. It signifies the psychological process from the tripartite model, as building a house becomes the process through which actors attach affection to an object. The insight provided by autoconstruction is that the house is a direct metaphor for the family and is deeply personalized; therefore, it should be expected that residents attach extreme significance to their home. Home is much more significant than the neighborhood in Serrinha. My research clarifies, as Hidalgo and Hernández (2001) do, that much more research is needed that focuses on the house as the range of attachment and the psychological processes that guide this. Moreover, more research that

draws on material analysis is necessary, as it encourages deeper analysis of the relationship between the social and physical and gives insight into the unsaid during ethnographic fieldwork. When I noted discriminatory beliefs during my fieldwork and interviews, I could never bring myself to ask a participant if they thought they were racist, though this division is a significant aspect of the Serrinha story. Hence, I asked myself: *Why brick? Why wood?* And a narrative emerged from these questions. This emphasizes the potential of ethnography for exploring favelas and other peripheral areas. Using the ethnographic method to gain more nuanced knowledge is invaluable, as it can give us creative methods, such as material analysis, to understand the unsaid in periphery communities around the world.

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Growing Up Between Cultures: How Second-Generation Migrants Perceive and Construct "Home"

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ABSTRACT

The word "home" can refer to a house, a family, a country, or even to a feeling of safety and comfort. Through increased mobility, the conception of home as a static place loses its meaning. For second-generation migrants, the children of migrants, the concept of home is ambiguous. They can have transnational ties to their parents' home country and the country they grew up in. The ambiguity leads second-generation migrants to construct home through reflective practices. Through in-depth interviews with eight second-generation migrants, we found that home is necessarily a complex and varied concept. The most important aspects to constructing a home are family (nuclear as well as extended family), a sense of community through shared values, and lastly reflective practices on what it means to grow up between cultures. While nuclear family provides the first safe space to create a feeling of home, feeling like part of a community is essential for feeling at home in a town or country. Some second-generation migrants find a community in the country they grew up in, while others feel rejected due to discrimination. In those cases, second-generation migrants search for cosmopolitan communities that share values of openness to difference.

Keywords: second-generation migrants; home; transnationalism; cosmopolitanism; mobility

> I say that I am Belgian because it's the quick answer but sometimes I want to say I'm from Africa, but I should explain that I'm from West Africa, and sometimes I want to say I'm from Senegal because some of my identity is from there. I never say I'm from Guinee Conakry except when people ask me what my origins are, and I say that, but it doesn't make sense for me. So yeah, Belgium is the quick answer but if I had to explain it to someone, I would say I feel Belgian and West-African.

We asked Elise what she tells people when they ask her where she is from; a question that for a lot of people will have a straightforward answer becomes far more complicated for second-generation migrants. Rather than being a simple statement, the answer to "where are you from?" warrants a long explanation with multiple layers. The word "explain" speaks to the complexity and affective work that it takes for Elise to talk about where home is and the feelings she attributes to it. Through her words, she showcases her previous reflections on the topic. For many of the second-generation migrants who we talked to, conversations and previous reflections about what home is and what it takes to feel at home are common experiences. Having a "quick" answer to people's questions, while harbouring more complicated and mixed feelings about belonging somewhere and feeling at home, is something that links Elise's experience to that of other second-generation migrants.

Commonly, the word "home" often elicits a feeling of safety and comfort. Not only can it refer to a residential building or house, but also situations, a group of people, and even culture (Baffoe and Asimeng-Boahene 2012, 68). In the twentieth century, through the promotion of home ownership as a source of personal identity and social status, "home" as a house occupied by a nuclear family came to be a prevalent conception. This static concept is laden with the ideological understanding of a white, Western, middle-class family (Mallet 2004, 74). As the world becomes increasingly mobile, "home" as a static concept loses its meaning. For second-generation migrants, the children of migrants, home can have multiple connotations referring to their country of residence, their parents' birth country, or both. For them, seen as both insiders and outsiders, home is an ambiguous space. Due to this position, second-generation migrants need to "actively construct 'home' from various vantage points and observe and practice both affinities and differences with the cultural others surrounding them" (Lloyd and Vasta 2017, 9). This position they occupy leads them to be very reflective of their experiences. Second-generation migrants' understanding of what it means to be a mobile person and how different geographical attachments and multiple cultural influences impact their identity can provide insight into the transformation of the meaning of home in an increasingly globalised, cosmopolitan world.

Through our research, we want to answer the question: How do second-generation migrants perceive and construct "home"? Second-generation migrants have a dual frame of reference due to growing up in one culture and being taught another by their parents. Thus, many second-generation migrants experience less attachment to or never "fully" experience either culture; therefore, they never "fully" feel at home in one particular place. Instead, second-generation migrants construct their homes through reflective practices and a sense of belonging to a community. First, we discuss previous academic work on the meanings attached to home, specifically in relation to the experiences of second-generation migrants. Second, we outline our methodology and ethical considerations in dealing with sensitive topics. Third, we situate our participants and elaborate on the three major themes found through in-depth interviews with second-generation migrants: the role of family, sense of community, and growing up between cultures. Lastly, we conclude with how second-generation migrants construct home.

The meanings of "home" in transnational times

Home has frequently been conceived as the physical living space that is occupied by a person, a family, or a group. In mundane communication, "home" refers to a house or a residential building (Baffoe and Asimeng-Boahene 2012, 68). Home can also refer to local neighbourhoods, cities, or countries (Ahmed 1999, 338) such as "birthplace" or "home town" (Baffoe and Asimeng-Boahene 2012, 68). Within that meaning, there can be different kinds of home: the place where one was born, where one grew up, where one lives at the moment, or where one spent a significant amount of time and has acquired a feeling of familiarity (Accarigi 2017, 192; Ahmed 1999, 340; Ralph and Staeheli 2011, 518-9). This feeling of familiarity refers to acquiring a sense of intimacy through *the lived experiences of locality* (Ahmed 1999, 341); in other words, being familiar with sensory experiences such as sounds, smells, and the landscape of a particular place (Hamilton 2017, 181).

The conceptualization of a static home—linked to only one particular location—is disturbed through mobility (Ralph and Staeheli 2011, 519). In modern times, through an increase in migration and globalization, the process of attachment to particular places has changed. The increase in mobility leads to temporality and uncertainty, which complicates the formation of affective attachment to places. While it might be harder to control for the uncertainty of migration, the focus on attachment to local places becomes more meaningful (Wiborg 2004, 417). Another significant change in the concept of home within the context of migration comes from the experience of "bifocality" or the "dual frame of reference" (Ralph and Staeheli 2011, 519). Migrants are influenced by both their country of origin and their destination; thus, they can refuse to be located in one singular place (Ralph and Staeheli 2011, 519). It is important to mention that sometimes the "refusal" to fit in, both in their country of origin and their destination, is less of a decision and more of a consequence arising from feelings and practices of exclusion. Nevertheless, second-generation migrants, if able to create transnational bonds, are likely to create particular attachments to different countries and can negotiate their conception of home.

An important factor that strongly influences the formation of attachment to the host country and/or their parents' birth country/countries is the experience of racial and ethnic inequalities (Algan, Bisin, and Verdier 2012, 10). According to Akerlof and Kranton (cited in Algan, Bisin, and Verdier 2012, 10), dominant social groups define themselves by excluding other social groups. With regards to national identity, specific minority groups are used by the majority to define the boundaries of an authentic national identity. This represents an identity conflict for migrants as they have to decide whether to assimilate into the mainstream by giving up their minority social identity or hold onto their cultural attitudes and be excluded from becoming a national. This decision is also particularly important for the second-generation, as their parents have to decide which cultural traits to pass on and which majority traits their children should assimilate (Algan, Bisin, and Verdier 2012, 13-14). Through the persistence of adopting certain cultural traits, first-generation migrants negotiate a trade-off between cultural traits of their minority social identity and the economic and social benefits of the mainstream social identity (Algan, Bisin, and Verdier 2012, 16).

While migrants can choose non-assimilation, it can also be forced due to cultural and/or economic exclusion. In response, they can adopt an oppositional identity (Algan, Bisin, and Verdier 2012, 10-11). These identities are defined in opposition to the majority and are associated with poor decision making and defiant/deviant behaviour. Due to the nature of these identities, theoretically, migrants can only assume either the oppositional or the mainstream identity. In reality, however, identities prove to be more complex and migrants can exhibit an oppositional identity and still form attachments to their host countries (Beaman 2017, 85).

The exclusion of minority groups based on ethnicity and race can be traced back to colonial times and the Enlightenment (Lentin 2008, 493). As Europe was rebuilt after the Shoah, the

topics of race and ethnicity became taboo in many European countries, and public institutions strove to claim that Europe was "anti-racist." This suppression of discussion often led to a lack of designated vocabulary to talk about race and ethnicity. This ban has rendered any discussion of race and ethnicity nearly impossible due to a lack of designated language. However, European identity is still, just as it was before, defined by the Other, particularly the other ethnicity and the other religion (de Leeuw and van Wichelen 2008, 274). Due to exclusion from European identity, first-generation migrants can maintain and partly pass on the social identities of their countries of origin and develop new social identities that span across national boundaries. Smith (2014) theorizes that a "diasporic consciousness" is shared among African migrant communities throughout different European countries and the world (as cited in Beaman 2017, 85). The systematic exclusion they experience, the understanding that their identity is constructed around the concept of the Other, and the shared awareness of being different may lead second-generation migrants to refuse to be located in one place and create transnational ties and a non-static conception of home instead.

Migrants are considered to construct transnational identities as they "establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders" and "develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders" (Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1992, 645). Hence, immigrants are considered transmigrants if they are able to sustain multiple links that cross borders. Transnationalism is a concept that has mostly been associated with first-generation migrants (Moore 2006, 159), as they are able to maintain their attachments to their home country through modern technologies of transportation and communication (Parutis 2011, 14). Second-generation migrants do not experience the same attachment to their parents' home country. While visiting extended family in their parents' home country and celebrating routinised events (like national holidays and birthdays), second-generation migrants create connections that can be described as sentimental or romantic, but they do not have the familiarity linked to daily routines, such as crossing paths with acquaintances in the street, knowing how to get to places by heart, or knowing when buses are likely to be late or early (Mallet 2004, 80). Moreover, second-generation migrants can experience exclusion based on their cultural identity due to being seen as foreigners by the local community (Bhimji 2008, 415).

Transnational ties and feelings of exclusion can lead to the development of cosmopolitan values (Roudometof 2005, 116). Compared to locals who identify with the culture and the country that they grew up in, cosmopolitans identify with multiple cultures and countries. Through the combination of transnational ties and feelings of exclusion, cosmopolitans can sometimes feel like they are never quite at home like locals. Instead, they create "this feeling at home in the world," which "could be specified as interest in or engagement with cultural diversity by straddling the global and the local spheres in terms of personal identity" (Gunesch 2004, 256). While cosmopolitans have local attachments, their cosmopolitan values, such as openness, take precedence over local attachments. Unlike locals that share experiences with the same culture, cosmopolitans find a sense of belonging to a community through the shared experience of creating a feeling of home that incorporates different cultural influences (Ebert 2017, 21). This community can consist of other cosmopolitans or locals who are open to cosmopolitan values.

In light of recent studies on the meaning of home for migrants, the concept has shifted from being a fixed entity to being differential social constructions that can be negotiated and depend on reflexivity (Wiborg 2004, 417). Within this new conception, the home-making process is understood as the production and reproduction of domestic space and domesticity through affective labour, for instance, continuing cultural practices or adopting cultural practices from the destination country (Accarigi 2017, 201). Home-ness is created through the combination of people, objects, ideas, and enacted relationships within a local space (Hamilton 2017, 181). These

factors create a sense of familiarity through the reiteration of everyday practices.

One prominent aspect of having this sense of familiarity and intimacy is that home is inherently linked with a feeling of safety and comfort (Ahmed 1999, 340; Wright 2009, 476). According to Keahey (1998, ix-x), home provides an oasis to relax and recuperate, and humans experience the feeling of "being at home" in multiple dimensions: social, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual. To feel "at home" and thus to feel safe is a universal human need (Keahey 1998, x). To that extent, home must fulfil the following conditions to create the feeling of safety: an environment where one can avoid scrutiny by others, a place of constancy where regular, everyday activities take place, and a space in which identities are formed (Baffoe and Asimeng-Boahene 2012, 69).

This paper attempts to expand on the literature presented by arguing that second-generation migrants do not have a fixed conception of being at home. Rather, the transnational ties they have created with multiple countries, the feelings of exclusion they may have experienced, and the cosmopolitan values they have adopted lead them to construct their feeling of home through reflexive practices and a sense of belonging to a community.

Methodology

Our research is a qualitative, exploratory study of how second-generation migrants perceive and construct the meanings of "home." The research follows the interpretivist paradigm, which states that objectivity only exists through the subjective meaning that people give to a situation; to find out the objective meaning of home, we sought to learn about the various meanings that second-generation migrants attribute to home and understand how they navigate the difficulties related to growing up between cultures.

We conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with eight second-generation migrants studying at Maastricht University. Using convenience sampling, four participants were recruited through a Facebook post and the others were acquaintances of the researchers and participants. The interviewees ranged from 18 to 22 years old (see table 1). All interviews were conducted in English and recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews lasted between forty-five and ninety minutes and took place at University College Maastricht. The questions we asked revolved around family, upbringing, external environment, feelings toward home, and what it means to be home.

We applied thematic analysis to the data. This method focuses on identifying patterns based on what participants say and, in some cases, how they say it (Braun and Clarke 2006, 79). We decided to code in an inductive way; rather than using pre-existing codes from the literature, we let the content of the interviews guide us. Some of our codes included struggling with the meaning of home, previous reflection on the topic, differences to parents, and celebration of holidays. After thorough refinement, we chose the following three themes to focus our analysis on: role of family,

Table 1. Research participants

Name	Age	Gender	Parents' country/ies	Country of residence
Eva	20	Female	Italy	Belgium
Elise	19	Female	Belgium, Guinea Conakry	Belgium, Senegal
Annie	19	Female	Iran	The Netherlands
Elena	20	Female	Vietnam	Germany
Valentin	21	Non-binary	Poland, Iran	Germany
Alex	18	Male	France, Cameroon	Germany
Ian	22	Male	India	Germany, India
Robert	20	Male	Poland, Malta	UK

sense of belonging and community, and growing up between cultures. The interviews contained a degree of reflexivity, and thematic analysis allows this aspect to come through (Braun and Clarke 2006, 82). By seeing our interviewees' experiences from their perspectives, we were able to make sense of their words in a more detached, critical way while still remaining true to their worldview.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations of the Research

Throughout the interviews, the majority of our participants expressed their struggle with what home means to them. The questions we asked were familiar to them as they had previously reflected on where they felt at home, what it took to feel at home, and what these things implied for the formation of their identity. The interviews revolved around the topics of family, growing up in their country of residence, and experiences with racism and discrimination. As some of these can be very sensitive topics, we asked participants to sign consent forms to make them aware of the type of questions that would be asked. To maintain privacy, we have changed our participants' names.

It is important to reflect on our position as researchers: neither of us is a second-generation migrant, and while we have tried to stay true to what our participants told us, it is possible that we did not always understand the depth and complexity of the experiences they shared with us. We are also white while the majority of our participants were people of colour, and it is important to consider that we are analysing and interpreting the experiences of minority groups from a privileged position. Additionally, it is also essential to mention a few of the limitations of our study. Our participants have different cultural backgrounds, have grown up in different countries, and/or their parents have immigrated from different countries. Although our varied sample could be a source for our diverse findings, we still found overarching trends across our interviewees' experiences.

Home: "Feeling wanted and feeling that the place gives me what I need"

In the process of analysing our interview data, we found that at an unconscious level, there is no difference between "being at home" and "feeling at home." We term this the unconscious inflation of house, household, and home so that these terms become synonymous. We understand the concept of "being at home" to be based on the modern, Western understanding of home as a house, owned and inhabited by one nuclear family undisturbed by mobility, racism, domestic abuse, or other factors inhibiting a sense of security. "Feeling at/of home," on the other hand, we understand as a product of affective labour that is located in a familiar space where relationships are enacted. This distinction will be a thread running throughout our analysis. Before diving into the discussion of the three themes, a short section situating our participants follows.

Being university students in Maastricht

Something our interviewees share is the social milieu they inhabit as Maastricht University students. Some of the questions we asked, such as Why did you decide to study in Maastricht? and Do you think Maastricht could ever feel like home to you? allowed us to gain insight into the social setting and everyday lives of participants. Maastricht is a small city situated in the south of the Netherlands, and students make up a large share of its population. While the university prides itself on having the most international community compared to other higher education institutions in the country, students mostly come from Western European countries. Thus, many of our interviewees did not feel represented inside the university nor in the wider city of Maastricht. While the majority of them also grew up in Western countries, their experiences still set them apart from other students who grew up being part of the majority group in their countries. Many interviewees mentioned the "Maastricht bubble" as a factor that limits their attachment toward the place they are studying in. Elise described the "Maastricht bubble" in the following way:

> Maastricht is quite a rich city. I don't see a lot of diversity… I don't see people asking for money in the street. In Belgium, when I go there, it's a big contrast, I see Black people, Arab people… so more diversity and I see the poverty and that's maybe a weird aspect, but for me home would be a place where I'm not in a bubble that hides these parts of society, like all the troubles.

The quotation shows that Elise is aware of living in a very wealthy environment where most students are privileged and voluntarily migrated to Maastricht in order to receive a good education. She mentions that for a place to feel like home, all parts of society need to be present while Maastricht seems to hide the "troubles" of the world. The lack of diversity in the city and the apparent absence of a wider socio-economic spectrum pose a challenge to being able to feel at home in Maastricht. Furthermore, Elise mentions that representation of Black people is also missing, pointing toward the fact that it is hard to feel at home in a place where no one looks like you. While other participants expressed similar views, some others also praised the fact that many students went to international schools and moved countries while growing up, and thus also have experiences of migration, albeit different ones from those of second-generation migrants. Alex mentioned that he found a community of like-minded people at university; for the first time, he is surrounded by people who understand him.

> We could relate to everything because we both had some kind of lack of representation if I understood her experience correctly and also another one of my best friends, she's French-Malaysian… she lived in France, she understands it or the friend I told you about, the diplomat kid who also has never had a concept of home… so with all these people, I just love hearing from them and feeling confirmed in my experience.

Beaman (2017, 91) posits that as a consequence of the exclusion from mainstream society, second-generation migrants often create connections with each other. In Alex's case, we can see that he has bonded with people who share his cosmopolitan values and similar experiences. He finally feels at home at university because he is able to converse with people about his experiences of exclusion and marginalization, and his feelings are mirrored in what they also went through, creating an almost instant bond.

Something else that interviewees had in common is that they all were living in temporary housing. Annie mentioned that feeling a bit lost in her student house and still not knowing her way around Maastricht after a year of living in the city contributed to her discomfort and inability to feel at home. Similarly, when asked whether he could ever imagine Maastricht feeling like home, Robert said that what matters to him is that the place feels comfortable. He does not have a sense of being "at home" but rather experiences a "homely feeling" in different places. For example, he mentioned an Irish pub in Maastricht that reminds him of the times he used to hang out with his English friends, bringing a sense of familiarity to an unfamiliar city. Thus, in order to create a feeling of comfort in a new city, it is important to gain a sense of intimacy by experiencing locality and finding places or communities that make second-generation migrants "feel at home" (Ahmed 1999, 341; Hamilton 2017, 181).

The role of family

The role of family in constructing home can be divided into the role of nuclear family, that is, parents and siblings, and extended family, that is, grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins. For our participants, nuclear family played a central role in "feeling at home." One of the conditions mentioned by Baffoe and Asimeng-Boahene (2012, 69) is that home should be a place where scrutiny is avoided, a place of safety and comfort. Elena, when asked about what makes her feel at home, described feeling secure and being taken care of and that her family provides these feelings.

> For me personally, [family plays] a big role, because if I think of home, I also think of my family immediately because my parents are taking care of me usually when I go home. So, it plays a really big role I think… because I think also the feelings [of security and comfort, free from scrutiny] I just mentioned come from my family because they give me that feeling in the first place.

Second-generation migrants often do not have extended family living in close proximity, which means that their immediate, familial support system is limited to their nuclear family. It is worth mentioning that all of our interviewees grew up in stable households and maintain good family relations with their nuclear family, and the comfort and security of nuclear family allowed our participants to "feel at home."

Our participants also expressed feeling comfortable and safe when visiting their extended family in their parents' home country. Eva explained that even though she did not feel like she was "coming home" when visiting her extended family, she did experience a "feeling of home." She was familiar with the values and traditions that her parents had taught her from their culture, and she recognised the familiar smell and taste of Italian food. Since being Italian is a big part of her identity, "feeling at home" equated to being surrounded by these familiar cultural elements in the place where her roots are. Other interviewees also explained that when visiting their extended family and recognizing their own values and traditions, they felt that they could explore and express a part of their identity that caused them to stand out in the country that they grew up in.

Our interviewees expressed that being able to explore and express the parts of their identity related to their parents' home country and culture resulted in feelings of relief. Being in an environment free of scrutiny regarding this part of their identity gave our interviewees a sense of ease. Elise described a sense of relief when being around African people in whom she could confide: "It's a relieving, safe feeling and a feeling that people can understand some troubles that I had.... I know part of the culture is from there, so I can talk about stuff and people understand and we can laugh about the same things." She repeated the word "understand" multiple times, which shows the importance of being surrounded by people who experience and live through similar situations. The ability to laugh about their troubles is indicative of a sense of comfort and security. Hence, Elise described feeling at home in Africa.

Alex, who did not feel at home in the country that he grew up in, mundanely referred to his mother's home country as "home" because, unlike in his hometown in Germany, he had not (yet) experienced hostility from the locals in France. "There is a very special connection with France. I have an emotional connection which leads me to being like, 'Oh my god, I wanna (sic.) go back home,' not meaning home in Germany, but home in France." In Alex's case, visiting his extended family has created a stronger "feeling of home" because the presence of scrutiny prevented the "feeling of home" in the country where he grew up. Second-generation migrants often refer to their parents' home country as an idyllic and magical place due to having created childhood memories (King, Christou, and Teerling 2009, 6).

However, Alex explained that although he has a strong emotional connection to France, he does not feel "fully" at home there: "I think it's just the attachment to the romanticization of it. I wouldn't like [living in France]; the attachment I have with France is purely emotional." Alex acknowledged that he has a romanticised idea of France due to the happy memories he associates with the country, such as visiting during the summer holidays. Yet, Alex stated that he would not like living in France because that would destroy the "purely emotional" bond he has with the country. When he had the choice to move there for university, he preferred not to, because living there would entail the possibility of encountering scrutiny and hostility from the locals. While the familiarity and comfort he feels in France allow him to create a "feeling of home" through his extended family, France is not "fully" home.

Although second-generation migrants can create a "feeling of home" in their parents' countries of origin through their extended family, there are some inhibitory factors. Geographical distance and differences in daily experiences with customs and popular culture make it harder to relate to extended family and to feel at home. Annie, who has a stronger attachment to the country that she grew up in, explained feeling different while visiting her parent's country in the following way:

> Well, I don't feel like it's [Iran] my home because the people are different from me and they always see from a distance that I am not from there. I just act differently, I am quite loud there, because they have low

> voices, and I sometimes just yell, "Hey mum, look a bat." And I just dress a bit differently, I don't know, every country and cultures have their own styles (sic.), and I don't really fit in. … I don't feel like it's my home, but I feel comfortable there and I have been there quite a lot so, I know the culture but still… I always compare it with my country, the Netherlands.

Annie, while describing a sense of familiarity and comfort when visiting Iran, mentioned that it is always apparent to her that she stands out from the local population. Rather than describing this in an exclusionary language, such as being seen as a foreigner, Annie related this to being "different" in how she acts, speaks, and dresses. Her visits to Iran prompted a reflective process on her identity, in particular on her Dutchness. Because she feels firmly rooted in her Dutch identity, she can reflect on the differences between the two countries and accept her status as a stranger in Iran.

Another inhibitory factor in constructing a "feeling of home" in their parents' home country is the language barrier between our interviewees and their extended family. Elise expressed that she and her extended family struggled with a language barrier as they had to communicate in English, which is none of their first languages. "We only came back for Christmas or during the summer and then we would see them, but there were these language barriers with my cousins…. But also, the fact that we saw each other twice a year. So, maybe it was kind of weird… at some point in the dinners (sic), it was kind of awkward." Elise mentioned both an issue of communication and the fact that she saw so little of her extended family that they were almost strangers. By describing the situation as "awkward" and "weird," she points toward feelings of discomfort and unease. Elise, however, added later on that she had become closer to her extended family in recent years due to living in closer proximity and better proficiency in English. Living near extended family allows second-generation migrants to become closer to their extended family as visits become more regular and familiarity can be created with the localities, the cultural practices and her family members.

Second-generation migrants can create a "feeling of home" in their parents' home country through extended family if they can overcome these obstacles, including geographical distance, language barriers, and cultural differences. However, second-generation migrants' attachment to their parents' home country is rarely as strong as first-generation migrants'. In contrast to their parents, second-generation migrants have a much smaller network of relationships in their parents' home country, as well as less familiarity with the locality. The exceptions to this were two of our interviewees, Elise and Ian, who had moved to their parents' home country for an extended period of time (two years and five years, respectively). Elise and Ian had a much stronger connection to their parents' home country than other participants, which stems from having their own lived experiences in these countries rather than their parents' ability to pass on their attachment. Elise and Ian have made their own bonds with their parents' home country by creating routines and memories while living there.

Nuclear family and extended family provide important safe spaces for second-generation migrants to explore and express their identities and construct a "feeling of home." Nuclear family is particularly important as the immediate support system and a place free of scrutiny, while extended family helped second-generation migrants to explore their roots and parts of their identity that differentiate them from their peers in the country that they grew up in. When factors such as perceived cultural differences, lack of familiarity or contact with the extended family, and language barriers inhibit an attachment to their parents' home country, second-generation migrants look for a sense of community to construct a "feeling of home."

Sense of belonging and community

A sense of belonging is an important part of "feeling at home," and it is created when an individual is part of a community through having shared experiences with others. In the context of transnational mobility, "feeling at home" is not related to a geographical location but tied to the practice of routinised activities (Accarigi 2017, 192). Home can mean a locality

where people have close relationships with their neighborhood or form attachments to a city square or a football team (Ahmed 1999, 340). Robert described the UK, the country where he grew up, as his "primary home" due to "having gone through the same education program" as his peers and having the same sense of humour. Annie, having grown up in a small Dutch town, described her experience of locality as being familiar with the streets and the people: "They always say that people from [a small Dutch town] are really proud of their city and I just miss the city itself sometimes, the cozy streets. When I walk around, I always see people I know, so that's nice. Now I have met a lot of people in Maastricht, so I sometimes see someone, but when I am at home, like always, like, oh hi, hi."

Annie places herself in the community of the town she grew up in, where she is a local and finds comfort in recognizing familiar faces when walking around. Having shared experiences allows second-generation migrants to "feel at home" in their country of residence because they feel that a large part of who they are is similar to the people around them. Robert and Annie can "be at home" in their country of residence because their sense of "feeling at home" has consistently been linked to their immediate environment, both the physical place and the community.

The "feeling of home" can, however, be disturbed when one is excluded from the immediate community. One reason for exclusion can be racism. Racism can accompany the migrant from childhood into adulthood, affecting different areas of social life: school, work, everyday life—it can happen on the street, on public transport, or in a supermarket (Greco 2011, 47). Alex, whose father is Cameroonian, recounted episodes of racism while growing up in a small German town.

> When I'm here in Maastricht I forget that there are places that are not diverse, and I've actually spent all my life there. Every time I go back, I just feel the looks… there are these little things, you walk on the street and people just cross the street or you go into a shop and the alarm bell rings just because you have an alarm on your clothes and there you go—there is that look. Or your parents being disrespected because either they don't speak that good of a German (sic.) or people just believe they don't speak that good of a German (sic.) or just people constantly trying to undermine you. That's what the external environment did to my family or to me.

Alex perceived the external environment to be extremely hostile toward him as one of the few people of colour living in the town. The sentence "that's what the external environment did to my family" showcases the agency placed on the environment, as it acquires a life of its own and becomes emblematic of the oppression and the pain he felt. The racist episodes Alex recounted were many, spanning from more subtle things such as "looks" to direct, racially charged comments. The environment he grew up in led him to reject seeing Germany as his home. There was no inclusion in school and no sense of community that allowed him and his family to construct meaningful bonds. Not being accepted by the majority social group and being made to feel different can lead second-generation migrants to feel like strangers in their own country. They are "citizen outsiders"—citizens on paper, strangers in the public sphere (Beaman 2017, 4).

Experiences of racism can lead second-generation migrants to feel more at ease and more welcome in immigrant or cosmopolitan communities. For Alex, Maastricht was a new beginning; he found a cosmopolitan community as well as a community of second-generation migrants with whom he could talk about things that other people would not understand. "I've always been alone in this and finally I'm not and I just love not being the odd one out anymore, just being one of many. It's a great feeling, a lot of people don't like that feeling because they've done this all their lives, but I've never been one of many and I finally am one, so I enjoy it very much."

Alex talks about being part of a community in which he is "one of many" and no longer "the odd one out." Continuous exposure to racist attacks makes one's home unlivable; if home is supposed to be a place of comfort and security, always feeling on edge and having to defend oneself from offensive comments can lead to a

complete rejection of the place where they grew up.

Alex expressed that the concept of "home" does not apply to him. In fact, for him, the word "home" refers mostly to a residential building or house. Alex also explained that he has attachments to several countries, but none of them truly feels like being at home. We asked Alex to describe "home" as a concept that would apply to him: "Feeling wanted and feeling that the place gives me what I need and also that I can provide something to that place. So that the place wants me and needs me. So, it's this symbiosis (sic.) kind of thing." Alex described home as a harmonious interaction between himself, the place, and the people. Home has to be a place that is welcoming and open to the expression of identity and a place over which one has agency – namely, the capacity and freedom to shape the physical environment and interpersonal relationships (Mallet 2004, 71). If the place has a "need" for him, Alex becomes essential in a way that counteracts his experiences of exclusion or isolation.

Experiences of exclusion can lead second-generation migrants to never "fully" feel at home. In turn, second-generation migrants search for migrant or cosmopolitan communities. The sense of belonging to these communities comes from shared experiences of having multiple cultural influences and transnational ties.

Growing up between cultures

The concept of transnationalism means having different links (political, cultural, religious) between two or more cultures that span across geographical borders. It is usually associated with first-generation migrants (Moore 2006, 159) because their roots are firmly planted in the country where they grew up and only later in their life did they move. The strong connection they have with their home country is linked to having a large network of family and friends and having spent a lot of time in one place, which allowed them to create familiarity and stability. This concept of having roots, both ethnically and culturally, in one place is different for second-generation migrants who have a harder time choosing to define only one place as home.

Alex, talking about his parents, says, "They grew up in their own country with their family all around them, they have that yo-yo thing. So, they just go back and then they're thrown out again into the world, but they always go back." Alex perceives that his parents, as first-generation migrants, have a different type of attachment to their home country. He senses that they belong to one place and will be inevitably attracted back. He does not experience this "yo-yo effect" because although he has a transnational identity, his bonds are not as strong— there is not a single "yo-yo" pulling him back.

> My dad he always pushes… "You're a Cameroonian, you're not German" and every time he said that—that's something that did not resonate with me. It just didn't feel right what he said, and now I understand why because it's not right. Because I am Cameroonian but I'm not only Cameroonian, I'm also part German and part French and part human, like a citizen of the world.

The realization that he is not fully Cameroonian like his father wanted him to be shows that Alex is aware that he will never be "fully" something. There are different parts within him that have been shaped by the different cultures and influences that he grew up with. Unlike his parents that belong to their home country and are pulled back to their "home," he feels that this understanding of the concept does not apply to him: "I define my life in other terms, it's not home, it's not that, it's just people I'm around, it's just an environment." He feels that the parameters that other people use to talk about what home is to them do not apply to him. Instead, Alex is composed of different identities and cultural influences that do not allow him to fully fit into a single community; he found other parameters (like the people surrounding him) to establish a connection that could feel like home.

For second-generation migrants, the difficulty to define what "home" is results from the fact that their identity does not completely match the country where they were born and grew up. Elena, who grew up in Germany in a household where she was predominantly taught Vietnamese values, describes her experience as "growing up between cultures."

She recounts never being fully immersed in the German traditions or the Vietnamese ones; both cultures were part of her upbringing and shaped different parts of her. The word "between" also points toward the fact that by trying to juggle both the German and Vietnamese way of living, she never fully experienced either one, setting her apart from the children who she grew up with.

Brocket (2018, 11) argues that the feeling of exclusion and in-betweenness experienced by second-generation migrants leads them to develop practices that centre around the self. Because they are not automatically from one culture, they are forced to reflect on their identity. Elena told us that the phrase "growing up between cultures" is what she likes to say to people who ask about the way she grew up or how she feels about being a second-generation migrant. The fact that she has prepared this sentence to tell people shows that she has spent time thinking about how growing up in Germany with immigrant parents has made her feel. It shows that she is conflicted about finding herself in this middle zone where she partially identifies with both Vietnam and Germany without experiencing the cultures wholly.

Eva, an Italian second-generation migrant who grew up in Brussels, expresses a sense of exclusion by mentioning that certain things about Belgian culture were completely foreign to her before she started university. "[There is] a lot of slang and language that I wasn't aware of. Sometimes you hear a word and I was like what does that mean? I wasn't aware of it. Also, artists, for example, Belgian music I didn't know, and they were singing a song that I didn't know because that wasn't part of what I was used to." Eva mentions not being in contact with Belgian pop culture because she was not used to it in her household. Therefore, "growing up between cultures" also means to feel left out because second-generation migrants might not be aware of certain aspects of the culture that other people feel very strongly about.

This reflection on the self and how they are different from the people around them leads second-generation migrants to be more critical of their homeland and host country. Second-generation migrants are influenced both by their parents' country of origin and by their countries of residence, thus they can have different perspectives on culture and refuse to be located in a singular place (Ralph and Staeheli 2011, 519).

> Can I legitimately say that I am half Polish even though by blood or genetics I am Polish -Maltese? But do I really fit in with these communities—not really. Can I say that I am a real Pole?... And then the same with England, having those cultural influences. You can sort of take a step back and observe English culture because... you have a different perspective because of the other influences that you have on your life.

Robert shows the difficulties related to having a different perspective and how having ties to so many places and cultures can make it harder to find your own identity and a place in the world where you belong and feel at home. This "bifocality," or in Robert's case "multifocality," leads him to be more critical of the cultures he has connections to. This might lead to cherry-picking as second-generation migrants welcome certain aspects of one culture while rejecting others that they feel do not align with their values. The process of making oneself at home in these spaces involves negotiation and manipulation of identity to suit the context as a way of maintaining agency over the process of home-making (Lloyd and Vasta 2017, 6).

Conclusion: Constructing home with transnational ties

Our study found that nuclear family provides a crucial space for second-generation migrants to feel comfortable, safe, and taken care of. Nuclear family tends to be the main support system for second-generation migrants as the extended family often lives far away. While in some cases extended family can also provide a sense of comfort and a space where second-generation migrants can discover other parts of their identity, it also serves to show cultural differences. Being around extended family can make them aware of the ways in which their culture, their language and their everyday practices are different from their extended family members. A big part of fitting in with a community comes from having shared experiences with others. When second-

generation migrants feel at home in the country that they grew up in, their experience of locality will be shared with their peers. If they face hostility from the locals in the form of racism, our interviewees were unable to recognize that place as their home. They might instead find a sense of belonging in other migrant communities where cosmopolitan values are upheld.

We make the important distinction between "feeling at home" and "being at home." Unconsciously, "being at home" still means residing in one physical location (house, apartment, residential building) with nuclear family. The household (family members) and the house itself are there to give the "feeling of home." This "feeling of home" refers to the familiarity with a locality—the lived experiences through everyday practices, lived relationships, and routinised activities that take place and provide a feeling of safety and comfort. Due to increased mobility, transnational ties, and cosmopolitan attitudes, a "feeling of home" becomes more detached from physical spaces. However, because "being at home" was understood as tied to a specific physical location that draws the person back throughout their life and is cultivated through a sustained "feeling of home" in that location, "being at home" becomes unattainable for some second-generation migrants. When interviewees discussed never being "fully" at home, they were referring to lacking the experience of "being at home." Instead, they create a "feeling of home" that is not tied to a specific location.

Being a second-generation migrant means having different influences in one's life that will inevitably shape one's identity and sense of home. These different perspectives make it hard to feel "fully" at home in a single geographical place. The many ties that second-generation migrants naturally have and develop throughout their lives lead them to be able to construct a "feeling of home" anywhere and everywhere, so long as they feel like they are part of a community.

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"We are similar, but different": Contextualizing the Religious Identities of Indian and Pakistani Immigrant Groups

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how Indian and Pakistani immigrant groups from the Bay Area in North California relate to and interact with one another. There is limited research on the role of religion in shaping sentiments of distinctiveness or "groupness" among diasporic Indians and Pakistanis in the UK and North America. Through conducting qualitative interviews with 18 Indian and Pakistani immigrants in the Bay Area, I recognized three factors pertaining to religion that were salient in influencing notions of groupness—notions of modernity, sociopolitical factors, and rituals. With respect to these three variables, I flesh out the spectrum of associated groupness; while some factors were linked with high levels of groupness, others enabled the immigrant groups to find commonality with one another. This research is integral to a better understanding of the interactions between South Asians in the diaspora, as well as to gain insight into how these immigrant groups—whose countries of origin share a history of religious conflict—perceive and interact with one another.

Keywords: Indian-Pakistani immigrant interactions; religious othering; Hindu-Muslim relations

We share the same food, same language, same sense of humor, same sensibilities; religion is the only difference," Junaid explained to me nonchalantly. As part of my endeavor to understand the interactions of Indian and Pakistani immigrants in the Bay Area, I spoke with Junaid—a Pakistani immigrant whom I found through Facebook—about one of his friendships with an Indian friend. After our conversation, a light bulb flashed in my head; I realized that I heard different iterations of the same claim from both Indians and Pakistanis—"We are similar, but different."

As Junaid's comment suggests, one theme that I found to be salient in expressing difference between the two immigrant groups was religion. The history of the Indian Subcontinent suggests why this was an expected outcome. Heightened political tensions and disagreements between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League from 1945-1947 led to the formation of India and Pakistan as independent nation states in 1947 (Pandey 2001, 21). What was perhaps unexpected was the rampant violence during the chaotic migration of millions of Hindus and Sikhs towards India and Muslims towards Pakistan, resulting in "the drawing of borders based on headcount of religious identity—so many Hindus versus so many Muslims—would force people to flee what they considered 'safer' places where they would be surrounded by their own kind" (Butalia 1998, 3). In this manner, the Partition amplified notions of distinctiveness between Hindus and Muslims on the basis of nationality. Ethno-religious and political conflicts between India and Pakistan—the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the Kargil War of 1999, and the never-ending dispute over Kashmir (Khan 2017, 209)—have arguably resulted in further divergence of the countries on the basis of ideologies rooted in religion. In the words of historian Yasmin Khan (2017), "In a close approximation of each other, India and Pakistan swiftly moved to consolidate their nations and to define themselves as autonomous states using all the national apparel they could muster.... None of this is too surprising, but the 'other' state necessarily became an object of comparison, a counterpoint, and was, to a greater or lesser extent, vilified in the process" (208). While Khan's comment is a reflection of India and Pakistan as distinct and opposing nation states, a subject of consideration is whether ordinary Indians and Pakistanis also view each other from such a perspective. It therefore becomes imperative to better understand how factors such as religion have shaped conceptions of distinctiveness, particularly biased and pejorative ones, among Indians and Pakistanis.

In order to better understand how Indian and Pakistani communities identify with each other, diasporic environments such as the Bay Area are worth investigating. This is especially important considering that for diasporic South Asians "religious affiliations have played an increasingly important role in community formation, and they have shaped the ways in which South Asians have identified and mobilized themselves in the United States as well as engaged with the political process in their home countries" (Mishra 2016, 7). Indians and Pakistanis from the two newly formed South Asian countries started gradually moving to the Bay Area from the 1950s onwards (Rajan and Sharma 2006, 6), resulting in stable Pakistani and Indian communities in close proximity today. This proximity enables us to analyze how Indian and Pakistani immigrants relate to one another on the basis of religion. Thus, this study explores how religion (Hinduism and Islam) influences notions of exclusion and inclusion among Indian and Pakistani immigrants in the Bay Area. Three factors related to religion will be analyzed: notions of modernity, sociopolitical factors, and rituals. For each factor, sentiments of distinctiveness and/or commonality among the two groups will be contextualized with respect to Rogers Brubaker's (2002) theory of "groupness" and the phenomenon of religious othering.

Theoretical Framework: Understanding Groupness and Religious Othering

Due to the demographics of the participants I interviewed, most Pakistani immigrants addressed being Muslim, and similarly, most Indian immigrants spoke of being Hindu. This difference in religious identity became an avenue through which some immigrants expressed feelings that they belonged to two separate groups. While trying to provide nuance to this Indian/Pakistani and Hindu/Muslim binary, a pertinent question to consider is, how do we account for the multitude of diverse religious traditions, sociopolitical values, and lifestyles that fall under the two categories of "Hindu" and "Muslim"? The work of Rogers Brubaker (2002), a sociologist interested in questions pertaining to ethnicity and nationalism, can help address this question. He states: "'Group' functions as a seemingly unproblematic, taken-for-granted concept, apparently in no need of particular scrutiny or explication. As a result, we tend to take for granted not only the concept 'group', but also 'groups'—the putative things-in-the-world to which the concept refers'' (163). In an attempt to distance ourselves from groups, Brubaker writes about the importance of shifting our focus to "groupness" (169). By distinguishing consistently between categories and groups, we can problematize—rather than presume—the relation between them. We can ask about the degree of groupness associated with a particular category in a particular setting, as well as the political, social, cultural, and psychological processes through which categories get invested with groupness (Petersen 1987). We can ask how people—and organizations—*do things* with categories.

Using Brubaker's (2002) terminology, we can think of Pakistani and Indian immigrants as belonging to two different groups with religion being one category that determines their groupness. Brubaker astutely points to the fact that "Hindu" and "Muslim" identities are taken for granted when they are written about in academia and even colloquially. He suggests that we must invest in the scholarly pursuit to better understand groupness: "the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group" (Brubaker 2002, 20). In the context of this study, we must shift our attention *from* Pakistani and Indian immigrant groups themselves *to* the fluid, dynamic processes of how these immigrant groups redefine, remold, and self-identify in relation to these groups. Understanding that groupness is fluid helps to explain why certain categorical differences that immigrants use to identify themselves can lead to conflict or distinctiveness; however, other forms of identification may lead to situations of neutrality or even commonality. For instance, Indians and Pakistanis in South Asia may have feelings of animosity towards one another while Indian and Pakistani immigrants in the Bay Area feel connected due to a shared culture and similar immigrant struggles; differences in religious and political ideologies, beliefs, and practices may fade into the background for some and resurface occasionally. Thus, we need to focus on how Indian and Pakistani immigrants themselves address and characterize the categories of "Hindu" and "Muslim," and how associated notions of groupness explain patterns of belonging, the dynamic process of identity building, and self-understanding in the context of the two religious categories.

In order to understand groupness among the two immigrant groups, I argue that we need to consider religious othering; that is, when a group is viewed or treated as inferior in comparison to one's own group. The scholar Diana Dimitrova (2017) provides an excellent analysis of othering in a universal context.

> While the players may change: depending on who the speaker is, it may be the West, the East, colonial nations or formerly colonized nations, Hindus, Muslims, heterosexuals or the gay/lesbian community, men or women, who are, or imagine themselves to be, in the position of power and who are "othering" the other party (without necessarily "orientalizing him/her/it/them"). (8)

She suggests that any group can perceive another group as the "other" on the grounds of nationality, religion, gender, et cetera through asserting power or dominance over that group. Thus, experiencing a sense of distinctiveness or groupness (using Brubaker's terminology) is not

enough for othering to occur; additionally, the other group must be perceived as inferior, marginal, or a threat. In the contemporary South Asian context, religious othering certainly plays a role in shaping groupness among Indians and Pakistanis. Religious persecution of minorities including Hindus has been an issue in Pakistan, and Hindu communities and religious sites have been attacked during political or ideological conflict with India (Isaphani 2017, 64). In a strikingly parallel manner, Indian Muslims are perceived as the other by the majority Hindu community and are often considered to be sympathizers or supporters of Pakistan on account of their religion (Ahmed 1998, 47). Furthermore, riots across Indian cities since 1947 resulted in attacks on Muslim ghettoes, which are stereotyped as "Mini Pakistans" (Tripathi 2016, 20).

Apart from internal national issues, foreign diplomacy, or military conflict, there are more implicit ways religious "othering" manifests in South Asia. We can see these notions implicated in some Indian films, which generically depict Pakistani men as terrorists and Pakistani women as oppressed on account of their religion (Daiya 2008, 153). We can also see religious othering in Pakistani social science textbooks; the Indian and subtly implied "Hindu" other is considered to be the enemy of Pakistan, seeking to destroy it through military and other means (Naseem and Ghosh 2010, 38). Limited research has been done on notions of religious othering among Indian and Pakistani immigrants and whether or not we observe similar notions in the diaspora. What is noteworthy is that these notions of religious othering in the Bay Area are influenced not only by the perceptions of religious communities in immigrants' countries of origin that they have grown up with, but also by the perceptions of the host country's inhabitants who may perceive people belonging to South Asian groups as the racial, religious, or even cultural other.

This leads to a key consideration: How do Indian and Pakistani immigrants relate to one another on the basis of religion, particularly based on the categories of "Hindu" and "Muslim"? To find plausible answers to this question, I utilized Brubaker's (2002) theory of groupness and notions of religious othering to design the methodology of a study involving 18 participants from the Bay Area in Northern California.

Methodology

This study was funded through the History Department of Claremont McKenna College. All of the interviews were conducted in the Bay Area during the summer of 2018 (June-August). In that time period, I conducted 18 interviews with Indian and Pakistani immigrants. The interview questionnaire was based on a list of scholarly articles and books, and it addressed various themes such as how participants formed opinions of their neighboring country growing up and how these opinions were affected when they interacted with immigrants from the other group in the USA. Furthermore, the questionnaire explored their take on contested political events between the two countries and immigrant journeys and experiences. I recruited participants through a host of ways: my personal network of family friends, friends they referred me to, national associations, and social media groups. The latter set of groups included the Alliance of South Asians Taking Action (ASATA), the Pakistani Association of San Francisco (PASF), the Pakistani American Community Center (PACC), and the Facebook Community of Post Colonial Memes for Oriental Minded Teens.

The cohort primarily consisted of working professionals with white collar jobs and college students. I have changed all participant names to guarantee anonymity. Table 1 provides details about the characteristics of each respondent. I ensured that the age range of the overall group was vast (20-96 years of age), and that both females and males were represented. The cohort was extremely diverse and included individuals who grew up in distinct parts of Pakistan and India. It was uncommon for immigrants to permanently stay in the United States upon immigration. After their studies or gaining work experience, many returned to Pakistan or India, lived there for a couple of years, and decided to move to/back to the Bay Area at some point. Since I am unable to provide so much detail in one table, I have indicated how long it has been since they last moved to the Bay Area. Interviewees had

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Participant	Immigrant Group	Gender	Age	Profession	Where they grew up	Years in the Bay Area
Sravya	Indian	F	20	Student	Hyderabad	3
Fiza	Indian	F	31	Tech	Hyderabad	3.5
Durga	Indian	F	32	Doctor	North, East and South (cities and towns)	~5-7
Madhavi	Indian	F	49	Tech	Bangalore	23
Gopal	Indian	M	53	Tech	Hyderabad	27
Anvesh	Indian	M	54	Tech	Delhi	26
Arun	Indian	M	60	Tech	Kolkata	26
Mohan	Indian	M	62	Education	Varanasi	39
Arjun	Indian	M	96	Retired	Karachi (before Partition) and later Mumbai	14
Sayyed	Pakistani	M	21	Student	Lahore	3
Ali	Pakistani	M	24	Consultant	Karachi	1
Junaid	Pakistani	M	28	n/a	Islamabad	17
Mehnoor	Pakistani	F	31	Business	Islamabad	5
Ayesha	Pakistani	F	33	Tech	Karachi	3.5
Amina	Pakistani	F	33	Diplomacy	town close to Islamabad	4
Zaid	Pakistani	M	36	Tech	Gujranwala and Lahore	4
Fatima	Pakistani	F	41	n/a	Many places, especially Karachi	2
Imtiaz	Pakistani	M	50	Sports	Karachi	~25

immigrated to the Bay Area during different decades—while some moved here 30 years ago, the younger interviewees arrived three years ago or so. This enabled me to capture potential interactions between and experiences of Indian and Pakistani immigrants across decades and during diverse time periods.

There were some limitations to this study. First, the distribution of gender and age could have been more equitable among both groups.

Both immigrant groups consisted of five men and four women, meaning that more men than women were included in the study (ten versus eight). Furthermore, since all women who participated were between 20-49 years of age, all interviewees over 50 were men. Overall, the Pakistani immigrants interviewed were younger in comparison to the Indian immigrants; this might have impacted the number of years that Pakistani immigrants spent in the Bay Area, which was generally fewer than the Indian immigrants.

There was also a lack of diverse representation of religious and socioeconomic backgrounds—mostly higher income and highly educated Indian Hindu and Pakistani Muslim immigrants were interviewed. Additionally, most of these interviews were done over the phone. While it is believed that telephone interviews result in the loss of non-verbal data, research suggests that it can enable interviewees to reveal sensitive information (Novick 2008, 398). Additionally, telephone interviews might be most appropriate when the anonymity of participants is required (Block and Erskine 2012, 432). Supporting these claims, I found that telephone interviews were ideal for discussing sensitive topics such as participants' own familial struggles during the Partition, religious violence, and stressors faced in the USA as immigrants. The fact that they were able to speak to me from the comfort of their homes in a private manner guaranteed that the interview was a safe and secure space for them, which I believe enabled some to feel more comfortable opening up.

Delineating Groupness through Modernity, Sociopolitical Factors, and Rituals

Using Brubaker's (2002) theory of groupness to guide the analysis of the interview material, I found three main factors that oriented the groupness of the Indian and Pakistani immigrant groups: notions of modernity, sociopolitical factors, and rituals. Each of these factors link to a variety of themes, such as identity politics, racism, food, festivals, and sites of prayer. For each of the three factors, I will point to the complex ways groupness is highlighted by the immigrants who I spoke with—some factors led to commonality while others led to high levels of distinct groupness. I will especially highlight instances of religious othering that were apparent for each category. Religious othering reveals extreme and contentious reasons for why and how strained relations exist between Indian and Pakistani immigrants, and are therefore important to examine.

Modernity

Timothy Mitchell (2000) suggests that modernity is associated with a "staging of progress, or the advancement of civilization" (20). At the root of modernity lies a comparison—one group's history and progress is inherently superior to another excluded group, which structures the perceived inferior group as the other. For instance, Mitchell (2000) highlights the "West" and the "non-West" comparison (5). The West was considered as the agent of technological advancement and development, while the non-West was static, unchanging, and inferior in its outlook, values, and social progress. In the case of the immigrants I spoke with, modernity of the two countries was determined by the perceived nature and predisposition of the majority religious group in each country. In other words, interviewees were invested in the debate of whether Islam or Hinduism was more progressive and religiously tolerant. Several Indian immigrants perceived Islam as regressive and the reason behind army rule and religious intolerance in Pakistan. On the other hand, few Pakistani immigrants expressed that Indians are Islamophobic, intolerant, or even superstitious on account of their Hindu beliefs. In this section, I will explore how participants expressed groupness between Indians and Pakistanis on the basis of perceived "modern" values.

Pakistanis are "Islamic"

Seven Indian immigrants revealed to me that they grew up with the notion that "Pakistanis are Muslim." The term "Muslim" did not seem to be just descriptive; rather, it was used pejoratively to categorize Pakistanis as regressive and parochial on account of being Muslims. By analyzing interviewees' use of the term Muslim to describe Pakistanis, I found that groupness manifested in two ways. First, in

reference to national narratives, groupness was based on a comparison of "secular Indians" and "religious Pakistanis." Several Indian immigrants implicitly suggested that Pakistanis were unable to adapt to modern principles of religious tolerance and governance due to the fact that they were Muslims. A more extreme iteration of this groupness was apparent in Mohan's (62, Indian) justification for why Pakistan was "unstable, militaristic, and financially poor". He explained: "The belief of Hindu religion and Islamic religion is inherently different…Islamic leaders incite Muslims in the mosque….Hinduism is almost the opposite. There is a sect of Hinduism that is more militaristic, but that is the minority. But even today in the world, in all Muslims countries, religion and state are most closely aligned." Mohan's comment suggests a clear distinction between Hinduism and Islam with national undertones. He perhaps implied that India is an inherently peaceful and functional nation because Hindus form the majority of the country, and their religion espouses peace and tolerance towards other religious communities. Pakistan, on the other hand, is "Islamic" and therefore violence, instability, and an affinity for regressive beliefs comes naturally to its people (suggested by the image of "inciting Muslims in the mosque"). Mohan's claim is similar to neo-Orientalist tropes in Europe and the West that render Arabs and Muslims as the other who are incapable of modernizing or adopting democracy in comparison to patrons of democracy and peace, such as America (Schmidt 2014, 169).

Yet another way groupness manifested was through three Indian immigrants directly comparing themselves to Pakistani immigrants. Through evaluating lifestyle and career choices that appeared to be motivated by religion, these Indian immigrants viewed themselves as more suited to a Western life and better acclimated to contemporary American lifestyles. Madhavi's (49, Indian) comparison between her Pakistani colleagues' wives and her is particularly reflective of this type of groupness. She felt that Pakistani women were bound by strict religious norms instead of pursuing a career: "A woman is not considered equal in Pakistan…honor killings. I could also see among my coworkers. Now their wives are probably working. At that time, they always stayed at home and were *burqa* clad. At the time, they were driven by religion." The long pause followed by her emphasis on "honor killings" during the interview created the impression that Madhavi believed that Pakistani women are seen as inferior to men due to rigid religious norms in the country that attempt to subjugate women and inflict violence upon them if they do not comply. Interestingly, she highlighted honor killings as if it is not a phenomenon that occurs in the Indian or Hindu context. She also seems to suggest that Pakistani immigrants abide by the same rigid religious norms that people in Pakistan follow—suggested by the women's choices to wear a *burqa* and stay at home. What is particularly noteworthy is that she, a working unveiled Hindu woman from India, seems to be the point of comparison here. Prior research highlights how women are held as "embodiments of modernity and tradition," particularly through analyzing their clothing in South Asian communities across national lines (Khurshid and Shah 2019, 190). The way in which Madhavi scrutinized Pakistani women (particularly through clothing) as an indication of Pakistan's backwardness is deeply reminiscent of the manner in which discourse has presumptuously deemed Muslim women to be oppressed both in the West (Khurshid and Shah 2019, 193) and India on account of their veil. Not only was groupness asserted between the women in each immigrant group, but also Madhavi's view of Pakistani women as bound by strict religious rules highlights how she othered Pakistani women as well. In this manner, Indian immigrants compared themselves to their Pakistani counterparts in two distinct ways. They expressed how India was more modern in comparison to an "Islamic" Pakistan. Furthermore, they also highlighted how modern Indian immigrants themselves based their ideas on their liberal religious beliefs that made them superior and open-minded immigrants in comparison to Pakistani immigrants.

Indians are "Intolerant"

Pakistani immigrants also expressed their thoughts about Hinduism and Indians' religious tolerance in a less frequent and more abstract manner (only four immigrants addressed

Indians as Hindus more generally). Interestingly, the same groupness based on national narratives that was evident among the accounts of Indian immigrants was also addressed by Pakistani immigrants, who suggested that Indians were religiously intolerant and regressive in their outlook (comparisons between immigrant groups were not discussed as much). Their premise is the antithesis of the "Indians (Hindus) are secular and progressive" argument that several Indian immigrants like Mohan expressed.

Sayyed (21, Pakistani), for instance, spoke about his perception of India growing up and how his grandfather's experiences during the Partition made him feel that "India" was religiously intolerant: "My grandfather used to tell me stories about how his *college educated* Indian affiliates before the Partition told him that 'either you have to convert to Hinduism or leave.' Growing up, I used to think that I'm lucky to be born in Pakistan as opposed to being born as a Muslim in India." Sayyed's emphasis on the fact that his grandfather's colleagues were educated is fascinating as it hints at the importance of education as a determinant of modernity and development among Indians and Pakistanis (Khurshid and Shah 2019, 191). He stresses that education did not have an effect on the views of the Hindus his grandfather worked with, implicating the perception of Hindus as jingoistic and unchanging in their discriminatory ways. As I see it, he also extrapolated the views of his grandfather's colleagues and imposed it on Hindus in contemporary India, implicitly characterizing Indians as religiously intolerant people who are anti-Islamic and a threat to Muslims. In Sayyed's comments, the generalization of Indians (particularly Hindus) across time and space certainly stands out.

Amina (33, Pakistani) also addressed the difference between Hinduism and Islam in different words: "Religion [Hinduism] is perceived as very narrow-minded and superstitious. And then we see a lot of things on TV about how they treat their minorities….In Indian dramas, we see superstitions. Those umm—what do you call those religious people—they do magic and all that? That's not common in Pakistan now." Amina draws a boundary between the two nations based on a perception that Hinduism is fundamentally rooted in superstition and magic, unlike religion [Islam] in Pakistan. Interestingly, she makes a direct link between the religiosity of Hindu TV characters in Indian serials and news showing violence against religious minorities in India, highlighting how Hinduism is closely related to violent acts committed by the state. Her comment paints Hindu practitioners as fanatic; they are blind believers in superstitions and also perpetrators of violence against religious minorities, which hints at the regressive nature of Hinduism. The perceptions that she speaks about other Hindus in a strikingly similar way to how Mohan othered Muslims.

Sociopolitical Factors

Politics and religion are closely intertwined. As political scientist Sangay Mishra's (2016) research has indicated, South Asian immigrants in the USA are involved in and engaged with the politics of both America and their "home" countries through representing their ethnic and religious positionalities (166). This observation is especially relevant with respect to two hot-button sociopolitical issues identified by immigrants that both involve the political and religious othering of Muslims: Hindu nationalism and Trump's rhetoric of anti-Muslim bigotry in a post-9/11 America. Considering the multiplicity of different experiences, political beliefs, and identifications, Indian and Pakistani immigrants expressed a spectrum of levels of groupness through their responses to how members of the other immigrant group reacted to the two political issues.

Hindu Nationalism

Since the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) came into power in 2014, many South Asians have been closely scrutinizing the party's leader, Narendra Modi, and Hindu nationalism in India. Six Pakistani immigrants voiced their concern over what they perceived as religious othering against Muslims in various parts of India in the past few years. Various topics were discussed: the BJP and its perceived anti-Muslim rhetoric, mob lynching of Muslims, human rights concerns in Kashmir, as well as meat and its precarious association with Muslims in India. For some Pakistani immigrants, the increasing incidents of Hindu nationalism resulted in them experiencing higher levels of groupness with

their Indian friends and acquaintances. However, other immigrants from both groups found that they shared similar views on religious extremism, particularly in India and more generally in South Asia.

Highlighting how support for the BJP resulted in groupness, Ayesha (33, Pakistani) addressed how she could easily relate to a specific Indian friend, but her friend's family's support for Modi during the 2014 elections made her reconsider this relatability: "I think, for me, what was particularly upsetting was seeing educated upper class Indians being willing to vote for a demagogue [Narendra Modi] who was virulently 'anti-Muslim' and 'anti-Pakistan' and like very nationalistic—it was deeply upsetting, and remains deeply upsetting for me." Her commentary about the BJP is telling. Ayesha highlights the intersection of class and relatability among Indian and Pakistani immigrants. She had earlier revealed that she felt that upper class elite Indians and Pakistanis (such as from "Bombay-Karachi or "Lahore-Delhi") have a sense of commonality in the USA. According to Brubaker and Cooper (2000), commonality is the sharing of a common attribute that facilitates groupness (20). The commonality that Ayesha alluded to was due to similar upbringings, educational backgrounds, and subsequent analogous immigrant struggles and aspirations. Arguably, Ayesha also suggested that this commonality is due to a mutual investment in liberal and secular political values that are not in favor of religious orthodoxy or extremism (either Islamic or Hindu). The fact that her friend supported a leader whom she perceived as both Islamophobic and Pakistanphobic made her feel that her Indian friend's family were not very similar to her own in terms of their political preferences concerning secularism.

On the contrary, some Indian and Pakistani immigrants were in agreement with each other about contested issues of religious extremism in India, such as the increased incidence of mob lynching Muslims over suspicion of beef-eating since 2014 (Sathyamala 2019, 879). Durga (Indian, 32) revealed that she rarely addressed India-Pakistan politics with her Pakistani friend. However, the "WhatsApp situation of mob lynching" (BBC News 2015) was something she was comfortable talking about, and in fact, her friend voiced similar concerns about bombings in Karachi, Pakistan. So whenever they talk about politics, they talk about how "stupid people are." Various participants' perspectives such as Durga's made it evident that conversations surrounding political issues in both countries are typically not brought up lightly or frequently by either immigrant group. However, upon discussion of these issues, Indian and Pakistani immigrants may find that they have a similar stance on political issues with religious undertones happening in South Asia. Durga's experiences suggest that even though the Hindu nationalist movement may aim to be exclusive, it paradoxically serves as an avenue through which South Asians of different religious backgrounds in the Bay Area can find a sense of commonality to condemn it. Joint efforts at activism are already in progress in the Bay Area—through immigrant and South Asian American leftists fighting against religious extremism in South Asia (Maira 2016, 148), or through community building among South Asians centered around an inclusive platform of social justice, human rights, and gender (Narayan and Purkayasta 2009, 175). The anthropologist Aminah Mohammad-Arif (2007) also highlighted such joint efforts through "progressive organizations" in the USA that particularly seek "harmony and rapprochement between the different South Asian communities and for peace in the Subcontinent, in particular between India and Pakistan'' (12).

Politics in America

Apart from politics in South Asia, understanding how Pakistani-Indian immigrant interactions were impacted by political events in the USA is integral for a deeper understanding of the different ways that South Asian immigrants identify and relate to American ideologies and political views. Upon inquiring about this, several incidences that participants spoke about included President Donald Trump's anti-Muslim campaign, the travel ban Trump implemented in 2017 to block residents from six predominantly Muslim countries from entering the USA (Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood 2017, 1), and racialized hate crimes towards South Asians in a post-9/11 USA. Yet again, I noticed that participants expressed a range of sentiments of groupness that were

based on support for Trump or lack thereof, and even as a response to racialized hate crimes. Generally speaking, however, immigrants from both countries cited racism, hate crimes in America, and protesting Trump during the past few years as avenues through which they could find solidarity with the other group.

Two participants highlighted how, implicitly or explicitly, Indians supported American anti-Muslim rhetoric. Fatima (41, Pakistani) laughingly expressed a "difference between us and the Indians" based on the fact that Indian parents she knew supported Trump in 2016 and voted for him. She remarked: "I perceived a fundamental difference based on sociopolitical values." Though Fatima laughed about the situation, her "us versus them" distinction indicates the serious implications of political choices that stem from support for an anti-Muslim ideology. Events in America such as supporting leaders or parties that contribute to the othering of Muslims or responding indifferently during moments of religious bigotry can sometimes highlight and exacerbate differences between Indians and Pakistanis. Examples include the efforts of some Hindu immigrants and Hindu Americans to establish a dissociation with Muslims and a Muslim identity post-9/11 (Kurien 2007, 190); likewise, showing support for Republican leaders such as Donald Trump mirrors support for Modi by Indians (or perhaps supporting Trump and Modi), who are both perceived to be populist leaders promoting anti-Muslim rhetoric (Thobani 2019, 750).

On the contrary, Ali (24, Pakistani) mentioned that protesting the travel ban initiated by Donald Trump brought him closer to his Indian friends: "It was nice to see that Indians were aware that it was unjust and unfair that this adversely affects Muslims." Ali presents Indians (a Hindu majority group) as being distinct from Muslims in terms of the fact that they are not entirely impacted by anti-Muslim policies. Considering developments post-9/11, South Asian Muslims particularly have been bearing the brunt of racialized hate crimes and anti-discriminatory law and immigration policies (Mishra 2016, 89), while South Asian Hindus have been relatively less affected. Perhaps in this context, Ali highlights an "us versus them" analogy; however, this example of groupness does not have negative connotations like those found in Fatima's comparison of Pakistanis and Indians who voted for Trump. In fact, Ali appreciated the spirit of camaraderie from his Indian friends to empathetically raise their voice for those Muslim immigrants who were affected. In this manner, different ways Indian and Pakistani interviewees establish or oppose groupness with each other based on political or religious experiences can coexist, resulting in political and emotional support between the two groups.

Additionally, Sravya (20, Indian) addressed the same notion of solidarity in the face of religious ignorance in a different manner. She spoke of an incident where a 70-year-old Indian Gujarati man was beaten by a white man who called him a "brown terrorist." She reveals: "In that moment, it wasn't about India or Pakistan, it was more like: how could you do this to the brown community?" Similar to Ali's account, she also suggests that othering and religious-based stereotyping can bring Indian and Pakistani immigrants together. Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) ideas of self-understanding are pertinent to this conversation. We can comprehend self-understanding as "one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act" (19). Unlike Ali, Sravya's self-understanding highlights that during moments of hate crimes motivated by religious bigotry against brown looking people (irrespective of religion), various South Asian immigrants stand united as one "brown" community. This community transcends Indian-Pakistani or even Hindu-Muslim boundaries. Mohammad-Arif and Moliner (2007) make a similar observation: "The experience of migration has also fostered a common South Asian identity that transcends national, ethnic or religious cleavages. This pan-ethnic, inclusive type of identification emerges at first as an exo-definition by the host society, whose representations, categorizations and policies tended to lump together people from the sub-continent" (14).

Rituals and Religion

Rituals play an essential role in both asserting belief and creating a sense of belonging among

those who participate together in performing or practicing them. However, when rituals are employed to create a distinct community, the practice of these rituals can define who belongs and who is excluded. With respect to the participants, three rituals were prominent: food, sites of prayer, and celebrating festivals. This section will demonstrate that for religious-based food preferences, contrasting levels of groupness were observed. However, sites of prayer and celebrating festivals together enabled immigrants to challenge notions of separate groupness on the grounds of religious identities and nationality.

Food

For some participants, food was seen as a divisive force that separated Hindus from Muslims. Fatima's (40, Pakistani) account is suggestive: "I have a group of [Pakistani friends] who believe that you can't go and eat at an Indian person's house. An Indian friend of mine—she would never come to my house to eat. Even if she would come to my house, they would not eat or drink anything….These are things they probably grew up with, that you can't go to a Muslim's house and eat." Fatima's comment is fascinating because it shows the extent to which her Indian friend allowed herself to interact with a Pakistani Muslim—she would visit Fatima's house but never eat there. Rigid food norms many Hindu communities may follow are rooted in caste notions of purity (Pechilis and Raj 2013, 60). These norms may be more aggressively followed by Hindus in the Bay Area relative to India because immigration from India has historically been an upper class and upper caste phenomenon (Kurien 2007, 45). Fatima also suggests that Pakistani Muslims have their own notions of purity pertaining to food. A few religionists have highlighted how some Pakistani Muslims engage in caste-based prejudices that work to other Hindus and Christians (particularly lower caste people) on the basis of sharing food. This is done in ways that parallel how upper caste Hindus position lower caste Hindus and Muslims as the other in India (Fuchs and Fuchs 2020, 63). Based on Fatima's account, we gain one perspective on how food norms result in high levels of groupness and religious othering that can separate Indian Hindu and Pakistani Muslim groups in the Bay Area.

However, not all participants perceived food as a point of religious difference when interacting with people from the other immigrant group. For five immigrants, food was a point of similarity. They spoke of how sharing similar food cultures and eating with one another enabled them to become closer to their Pakistani or Indian friends. Junaid (28, Pakistani) spoke about connecting with an Indian friend through sharing food: "In college, I made a close friend named Vikram from Bombay. We are still in touch and hang out often. We share the same food, same language, same sense of humor, same sensibilities; religion is the only difference." His comment demonstrates that many Hindus and Muslims are not bound by orthodox food norms as Fatima's accounts suggested. This appears to be especially the case for younger Pakistanis and Indians. Junaid attributed food as a branch of the category of culture (along with language and humor) that is distinct from a religious "mode of categorical identification" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 15). For immigrants such as Junaid and Vikram, sharing food and eating with one another highlighted cultural commonality between the two countries rather than exacerbating religious differences.

Prayer and Sites of Worship

Unlike food, which served as a point of contention between Pakistani and Indian immigrants in some cases, encountering other immigrants at sites of worship enabled several to resolve qualms or contentions about the perceived religious "other." This operated on two levels: between Indian and Pakistani Muslims and between Indian Hindus and Pakistani Muslims.

The key enabler of Indian-Pakistani Muslim interactions was the mosque, which four Muslim interviewees spoke of. Fiza (31, Indian) talked about how her mosque enabled her to make Pakistani friends: "The mosque is an example of how you have many, many diverse cultures around the world. One of my closest Pakistani friends I met at the mosque…you get to meet and know diverse communities. I have met people from countries I've never even heard of." Fiza highlights that the collective experience of attending the mosque, praying together, and observing festivals enabled

practitioners to resolve differences based on nationality, ethnicity, and race that extended beyond South Asian markers of differences in identity (such as the Indian Muslim-Pakistani Muslim marker). She found that many of the stereotypes she grew up with of Pakistanis being "uneducated and violent" were disproved based on her experiences at the mosque. Her revelation implies that Indian Muslims may harbor negative stereotypes of Pakistani Muslims based on media or popular perception, causing Indian Muslims to view them as the Muslim "other"—vice versa may hold true as well. The mosque therefore serves as a site where this type of religious othering and groupness can be challenged. Fiza's change in self-understanding is reflective of similar fraternal relations between Indian Muslims and Pakistani Muslims, who found many commonalities with one another based on culture and language, in New York in the 1970s (Khandelwal 2002, 70).

In terms of interreligious encounters between Indian Hindus and Pakistani Muslims, events in religious centers or prayers at home created avenues to better understand the religious other. Durga's experience with her Pakistani best friend Sanam is a testament to the fact that attending religious sites frequented by South Asians of all faiths can enable immigrants to become more open-minded and reflective of religious misconceptions that they may harbor of the other religious group. In Durga's words: "Sanam and her husband are very religious, they read *Namaz* in front of me or in my bedroom. I have become quite comfortable with day to day Muslim life, instead of before where I often thought 'what are these other people doing?'" Durga's experience highlights that an eye-opening visit to the mosque or temple is not necessarily required for immigrants to better understand the other group's religiosity. In Durga's case, she simply observed her friend doing her everyday prayers at her house, which made her comfortable with the everyday experience of being Muslim.

Festivals

Similar to encounters at sites of worship, the collective celebration of religious festivals had a unanimous positive impact on establishing commonality between both immigrant groups. For over 12 participants, both Hindu and Muslim festivals were opportunities to celebrate with South Asians of all faiths and nationalities. This was evidently the case due to two reasons: celebrating religious festivals in an inclusive manner growing up and the secular celebratory ethos of festivals in the Bay Area.

To varying degrees, both immigrant groups were considerably well-informed about how the other religious group (Hindus or Muslims) celebrates key festivals such as *Holi, Diwali,* and *Eid* due to their own prior experiences growing up or through media representations. Anvesh (54, Indian) and Gopal (53, Indian) both expressed their affinity for the celebration of *Eid*, eating food and being invited to *iftar* parties in their respective cities growing up. Fatima (41, Pakistani), a Muslim, spoke about her experiences with Hindu festivals in Karachi and how she would participate in *Holi* functions hosted by some Hindu families who decided to stay back in Pakistan during the Partition. Several immigrants cited these as favorable opportunities to understand the other religious group in a more intimate fashion, suggesting that festivals were spaces where religious groupness could be challenged and remodified. Their accounts challenge conventional narratives that promote groupness, such as Pakistan celebrates Muslim festivals or India celebrates Hindu festivals, and highlight the hybrid inclusivity of South Asian festivals. From these accounts, one can sense that perhaps some Indians and Pakistanis carry an enthusiasm for celebrating religious festivals of diverse faiths with them from their countries of origin to the USA if they had prior experience or habit of doing so.

Additionally, South Asian religious festivals in the Bay Area can function as secularized social celebrations and parties that are slightly divorced from their religious origin and can include many people of many faiths. This enables Indians and Pakistanis to better understand different religious communities (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, et cetera) in an immersive and inclusive festive setting. Imtiaz (50, Pakistani) spoke of how religious festivals such as *Diwali, Holi, Eid*, and *Ramzan* were a means for his Indian friends and him to celebrate: "No matter what happens, we'll never

say 'oh, we won't go to their [Indians'] house.' Like for *Eid*, we always invite our non-Muslim Indian Friends (i.e. Hindus and Christians). Whether it's dinners or parties, we will invite them. Doesn't matter if some war is happening, if the World Cup is happening." Imtiaz implies that his celebration of *Eid* is an inclusive social space for all South Asians irrespective of nationality and religion. While the associated religious rituals may be observed exclusively by Muslims, the accompanying celebrations involving food and entertainment can involve non-practitioners as well. His comment particularly stands out because he suggests that despite tensions between India and Pakistan (high levels of groupness), the inclusivity of *Eid's* festivities are not compromised.

Conclusion

At the root of Brubaker's (2002) exegesis of groupness lies the notion of distinctiveness between one's own group and another group. Essentially, groupness is a way to assert ideas of inclusion and exclusion between the self and the other. Indian and Pakistani immigrants may find a sense of commonality around certain factors, but they can also experience a sense of distinctiveness around other factors that sometimes leads to a more extreme form of groupness with impacts such as othering. In the context of the immigrants I interviewed, I found that there were a myriad of factors and agents that shaped how Indian and Pakistani immigrants understood how the two groups differed from a religious perspective. For many, family, educational institutions, and even the media were responsible for shaping immigrants' notions of historical and national narratives such as modernity. Notions of modernity that they grew up with often promoted high levels of groupness and even religious othering based on interpretations of how tolerant the majority religious community of the other country was. These notions of modernity are not mere abstract ideas; in fact, they tangibly affect Indian-Pakistani immigrant interactions. They can cause tension in relationships when Indian immigrants express skepticism or intense surprise about secular perspectives of Pakistani immigrants, or even when Pakistani immigrants suggest that Indians do not care about the status of Muslims in India.

Upon immigration, the ever-changing dynamics of internal policies, identity politics, and religious biases or othering in both the host country and the country of origin can cause the two immigrant groups to feel either estranged from or connected with one another. In the case of this specific cohort, the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric in post-9/11 America were pertinent sociopolitical factors. The support for Modi and Trump, speaking out on issues pertaining to religious hate-crimes such as mob lynching in India or racial profiling in the USA, and standing in solidarity with the other immigrant group played a major role in making some immigrants feel distanced from one another and shaping new modes of commonality for others. Furthermore, the way that these immigrants identified with each other also changed as a result of Americans' perspectives, which helps to explain why few immigrants actively spoke of themselves as "Muslims in America" while others identified with the idea of being "brown."

Apart from sociopolitical factors, rituals also played a key role in reifying notions of exclusion or separation between Hindus and Muslims and, by extrapolation, Indians and Pakistanis. Food norms stemming from beliefs of religious purity exacerbated notions of groupness or even religious othering when Indians and Pakistanis were unable to eat with one another. However, for several other younger immigrants, these food norms were not being adhered to, and in fact, sharing similar tastes in food and exchanging food with one another enforced ideas of cultural similarity and fraternity between the two immigrant groups. This highlights how religious notions of groupness are closely intertwined with gender, class, age, caste, and religious practice. Similar to how food exacerbated differences in some cases, entrenched groupness has repercussions of creating potential misconceptions between not only Indian Hindus and Pakistani Muslims, but also between Indian Muslims and Pakistani Muslims. However, rituals such as the opportunity to encounter the other religious group at their sites of prayer created a positive effect for a better understanding of the other

immigrant group from an interreligious or intrareligious perspective. Similar to the positive effects of sites of prayer, celebrating festivals together—irrespective of religious or national boundaries—reinforced inclusivity, challenged typical notions of groupness, and provided an opportunity for immigrants to celebrate in solidarity.

All in all, a myriad of ideological, sociopolitical, cultural, and ritualistic modes of being intersected to shape how these Indian and Pakistani immigrants understand their religious identities in relation to one another, albeit differently for each immigrant and over time. As the acclaimed Nisid Hajari points out in his book *Midnight's Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India's Partition*, the rivalry between India and Pakistan "is getting more, rather than less, dangerous: the two countries' nuclear arsenals are growing, militant groups are becoming more capable, and rabid media outlets on both sides are shrinking the scope for moderate voices" (Hajari 2016, Epilogue). In order to allow for the rise of moderate voices that advocate for peace between the two countries, continued research must address the phenomena of groupness and religious othering among Indian and Pakistani communities while searching for ways to explain and challenge them in South Asia and beyond.

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No Façade to Hide Behind: Long-Distance Hikers' Journeys Through Self and Society

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study uses a phenomenological approach to better understand how Appalachian Trail (AT) and Long Trail (LT) thru-hikers create meaning and make sense of their experiences while hiking. Drawing on participant observation and in-depth interviews with 13 hikers, I analyze hikers' initial reasons for hiking, their reflections while on the trail, and the impacts thru-hiking had on their self-concepts and social lives. Key findings demonstrate how life on the trail contrasts with hikers' everyday lives in society and thus suggest ways that their experiences on the AT/LT may give insight into nature, community life, personal change, and the process of personal reflection. In particular, this study suggests that long-distance hiking builds personal skills and confidence. Further, this research uses a phenomenological approach as well as the concepts of liminality and communitas to analyze the creation of an alternative trail subculture and new personal identities on the trail, including trail families.

Keywords: Long-distance hikers; phenomenology; ethnography; liminality; self-reflection; communitas

In 2013 when I was 23 years old, I ventured off on a three month, 800-mile stretch of the Appalachian Trail from Erwin, Tennessee to Duncannon, Pennsylvania. While on the trail, I adjusted to living amongst the elements, building leg muscles, and sleeping outdoors, which was a radical change from living indoors with all of one's creature comforts. During the first week, I hiked through freezing temperatures, sleet, high winds, and up icy mountain-tops—some of the most intense hiking conditions I had ever experienced. After a few days on the trail, my friend Lace and I were coming to the end of our miles for the day. We didn't have much time before sundown and were heading up a mountain to get to an old cabin that was converted into a shelter. The trail up this mountain was covered in ice, so the only way up was by grabbing on to thick tree trunks and pulling ourselves up with our 40-pound backpacks on. The trail was so slippery and dangerous that the only safe way to go was very slowly and cautiously.

This period of my young adult life was very much one of transition: a time when I was reflecting on what I wanted to strive for in life and what type of job I wanted to pursue. My own experiences on and off the trail made me curious about the different reasons why people decide to embark on a long-distance hike and how they reflect on their experiences. For example, how might personal identities change on the trail, and how are new social relationships and communities formed? In what ways does this new trail culture contrast with hikers' everyday lives both before and after their long-distance hikes? And what is the role of personal reflection in this process?

With these questions in mind, this research aims to better understand how Appalachian Trail (AT) and Long Trail (LT) thru-hikers create meaning and make sense of their experiences while hiking. Initial reasons for hiking, experiences on the trail, and the impact of thru-hiking on hikers' self-concepts, personalities, relationships, and creation of a new sense of community will all be explored. Further, this research utilizes the analytical concepts of liminality and communitas to analyze the creation of an alternative trail culture and the emergence of "trail families," as well as a phenomenological approach to understand how new personal identities are formed and experienced on the trail in contrast with the everyday realities hikers return to once their hike is completed.

Ethnographic Studies and Personal Memoirs about Long-Distance Hiking

Over the last decade, long-distance hiking trails have become popularized through films and books such as Cheryl Strayed's *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* and *On Trails: An Exploration* by Robert Moor, which was inspired by the author's experience thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail. Several studies have also been conducted on long-distance hiking and specifically on hiking the Appalachian Trail. Susan Bratton's (2012) research explores how long-distance hiking can assist someone in making a life transition, gaining self-confidence, providing relief from stress, or helping to resolve major changes in personal relationships. Furthermore, hiking can stimulate spiritual growth and act as a restorative environment that is not solely based on contact with nature, but also focuses on being away from the constraints of everyday life and having time for personal reflection. Kristi Fondren's (2016) study focuses on the sociality and social practices of the long-distance hiking community and what impacts recreational settings have in the formation of leisure subcultures and subcultural identities. Fondren views long-distance backpacking as a resistance to societal structures and values of modern life such as monetary gain, media influence, consumerism, materialism, and the bustle of work and family. Lucy Bosche's (2013) work discusses women's experiences navigating the subculture of the Appalachian Trail and Pacific Crest Trail through memoirs and trail blogs using Victor Turner's

concepts of liminality and communitas. Bosche discusses the transformations hikers undergo through experiencing liminality as they become immersed in trail life and establish an alternative identity through a trail name.

Turner's (1969) concepts of liminality and communitas similarly inform this research by providing lenses to understand the transformation a long-distance hiker may undergo as they leave the structure of their everyday lives and relationships and embrace a new identity and reality on the trail. Long-distance backpacking is a pursuit that requires one to uproot one's life and leave behind family, friends, obligations, and work to experience something different than one's everyday life. For this reason, endeavoring on a long-distance backpacking trip can be viewed as a period of liminality. Liminality is a sociological/anthropological term first noted by van Gennep ([1909] 1960) and later used by Victor Turner (1969) to describe an ambiguous phase of being in the middle of a transition, an in-between period in which one has not fully transitioned from one thing to another. During this period, the norms of everyday life no longer apply and participants undergo a restructuring of their identity, time, and community and enter into a new way of life. Liminality is often associated with the middle part of a rite of passage, which may be defined as a ritual marking a life transition from one social status to another (Turner 1969).

Additionally, a liminal state is often brought about unexpectedly, as in the case of refugees and some migrants, and can persist until the person reintegrates into a new identity. In contrast to this type of liminal state, thru-hikers voluntarily choose when to begin and end their liminal state of life on the trail. Similarly, I argue that the trail often constitutes a transitional period between one chapter in a person's life and the next. One way that hikers on the AT/LT restructure their identity is through adopting a trail name that is symbolic of a new start, a rebirth. Trail names are typically given from one hiker to another and highlight some sort of quirk about that individual. However, some hikers create their own trail name. Hikers also tend to adopt values of free expression and non-judgment on the trail, which contributes to their newly formed identities.

Communitas, another concept that Turner (1969) discusses, refers to an unstructured community of people wherein all members are considered equal and are united by a common experience, usually a rite of passage. Communitas also refers to the spirit or common feeling of people experiencing liminality together. Communitas is formed on the trail as hikers bond over their shared experience and newly adopted values and create trail families.

In contrast to earlier studies, my research uses a phenomenological approach to understand the process of personal transformation as hikers make sense of their experiences on the trail. Endeavoring on a long-distance backpacking trip can alter a person's sense of reality and identity due to exposure to vast differences in social realities from everyday life to the culture on the trail. Phenomenology is defined as "the study of things as they appear in our lived experiences" (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, 88) and addresses how people construct social reality in their everyday lives (Lemert 2017; Ritzer 2018). As explained by Berger and Luckmann (1966), in human society the social construction of reality involves an ongoing dialectical relationship between externalization, objectivation, and internalization (149).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) further suggest that externalization occurs when humans perform various habitual actions that create and shape social structures and institutions, formulating typical assumptions, expectations, and behaviors. These social structures and institutions then appear to have their own independent and objective existence that has power over us. Internalization is the process in which we internalize this objective social world, which then becomes part of our identity. However, both individual and social experiences may cause one's pre-existing social reality to conflict with a new reality, which may result in a radical change of perception of themselves and their social relationships (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

A phenomenological perspective helps us to consider the image that thru-hikers have of

themselves prior to hiking the trail and how this may change on the trail. Contradictions of what one considers "normal" might occur, as exposure to the subculture of the AT/LT could cause one to question their perceived reality of everyday life, at which point one can then choose which reality to accept. Opportunities for incongruities to arise between one's primary relations such as family and friends and secondary socialization such as other thru-hikers may arise, which also encourages thru-hikers to question their perceptions. Endeavoring on a thru-hike takes the person outside of their ordinary experience, revealing and bringing into question many things that they have taken for granted up until that point, which may lead the hikers to radically change their perceptions. One is found within a new reality. In such insightful moments the veil is lifted and one is able to view their experience differently, which makes one realize that a new reality can be constructed (Berger and Luckmann 1966). In this way, we are able to understand how a hiker's sense of self, community, and society may change as a result of their exposure to the subculture of the AT/LT. While an extraordinary moment of insight can be enlightening, it cannot be sustained over time; however, it does create a new social order and allow new habits to arise (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Importantly, focusing on how personal change occurs on the trail does not suggest one particular reality or only individual realities for hikers on the trail. On the contrary, multiple subjective and intersubjective experiences exist. Phenomenologists argue that subjectivity is deeply intersubjective in nature (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, 91), stressing how social interaction may influence our sense of self. While phenomenology looks at individual experiences and reactions, it also emphasizes multiple realities unfolding through social interaction. On the other hand, communitas not only highlights social bonding such as within trail families, but also emphasizes individual identity. In the words of Edith Turner (2012), communitas "does not merge identities; the gifts of each and every person are alive to the fullest" (3). A radical change in perception can be brought about simultaneously through self-reflection and communal engagement. While these differing phenomena may appear to contradict each other, subjective and intersubjective experiences are happening simultaneously and make up the complexity of the overall experience for thru-hikers.

This process brings into question how hikers' newly constructed identities are formed and to what extent their newly formed identities carry over into their everyday lives after finishing their thru-hike and reintegrating back into the larger society. This is the first research study about Appalachian Trail thru-hikers using a phenomenological theoretical approach with an explicit focus on the process of personal reflection.

Methodology

This study uses ethnographic research methods, which include participant observation and in-depth interviews with 13 long-distance hikers who have completed or who were currently hiking on the Appalachian Trail and Long Trail during the time of the interview. Ten participants were recruited on the AT/LT in southern Vermont. Three participants were thru-hikers who had previously completed the AT in 2013 and were contacted and interviewed via phone or in person.

In July of 2019, I backpacked on a section of the AT/LT in southern Vermont for five days. During this time, I conducted participant-observation through backpacking, personal reflection, interacting with other hikers, and recording my experiences (see figure 1). Having previously hiked a large section of the AT and being a participant-observer helped me to establish rapport as another hiker on the trail rather than as an outsider coming in. Hiking on the trail and being part of the community seemed to increase trust between me and the hikers I interviewed. The hikers might have talked with me differently if we had not shared this experience.

Throughout the interviews, my own personal background as a hiker also helped to facilitate conversations as I could relate to interviewees from my own experiences while on the trail. At the same time, I avoided projecting my own experiences onto others by asking neutral questions and listening carefully and non-judgmentally to responses.

I collected demographic information about each hiker, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, economic comfort level, religion, employment, place of residence, and education. I then asked hikers questions about their motivations before hiking, experiences while on the trail, and impacts after completing the trail or anticipated impacts of hiking the trail on reintegration. My questions included what prompted them to do a long-distance backpacking trip on the AT/LT and what their intentions, expectations, and hopes were before going on the trail. Information about each hiker's experience while on the trail was collected by asking about their overall experience, personal reflections, how spending extended periods of time in nature affected them, the culture of the AT/LT, and how it differed from everyday life. I also asked hikers how thru-hiking impacted their views of themselves, community, and society and about their experience or anticipated experience of reintegration and lifestyle changes after hiking the trail. I changed hikers' trail names in this study in order to keep their identities confidential. I transcribed, coded, and analyzed the interviews thematically using qualitative data analysis techniques (Esterberg 2002). I also compensated hikers with Dunkin Donuts gift cards and s'mores.

Figure 1. Backpacking and conducting participant-observation on the AT/LT.

Location Overview

The Appalachian Trail (AT) runs about 2,200 miles long along the eastern side of the United States between Springer Mountain in Georgia and Mount Katahdin in Maine. The AT passes through 14 states and is the longest hiking-only trail in the world. The Long Trail (LT) is a hiking trail that coincides with the AT in southern Vermont, runs along the ridge of the Green Mountains, and runs north to the Canadian border. The LT runs the length of Vermont at 273 miles. This research was conducted on the AT/LT in southern Vermont on an 11-mile stretch between Peru Peak and Little Rock Pond. Interviews were arranged at two different locations on the trail, including Peru Peak Shelter and Little Rock Pond Shelter (see figure 2).

Participants

In this study, ten out of thirteen participants were male and eleven out of thirteen hikers were white, which is typical of AT/LT hikers (Bosche 2013). Two hikers were of mixed race. Most hikers reported being comfortable with their socioeconomic status and not struggling to get along (see table 1). I used this term because I did not want to make my interviewees uncomfortable by prying into their socioeconomic status, and I was mainly interested in understanding their self-perception of whether they felt like they were economically struggling or not.

Data Analysis

Reasons for hiking

My discussions with the thru-hikers revealed various attitudes about their intentions and expectations of hiking the trail. The hikers' ages and positions in life shaped their motivations for setting out to thru-hike the Appalachian

Trail or Long Trail. Common responses to what prompted hikers to thru-hike the AT/LT were to navigate a transition in one's life, gain perspective or to get to know oneself better, take an opportune time in one's life to fulfill a

Figure 2. Little Rock Pond Shelter on the AT/LT

bucket list experience, and seek challenge, freedom, or adventure. Some thru-hikers were seeking a way to disconnect from their current situation, including school, a career, or an unhealthy living or social situation, in hopes of initiating a change. Hikers saw that the trail offered a way to handle a change in one's life. For some, the trail was a way to resolve an internal conflict about the direction of their life or the kind of person they wanted to become.

One hiker named Pilot from Massachusetts, who completed his thru-hike in 2013, was previously a student before starting on the AT. Pilot discussed his impulse to hike as a means to contemplate his major and the direction of his career. Another hiker named Aqualad, who is a student from Montreal, Canada, was seven days into his hike on the Long Trail in Vermont when I met and interviewed him. Aqualad expressed his desire for hiking as a way to get to know himself and what he wanted to do in life outside of external pressures despite knowing this experience was not going to advance his degree or career. For Ladybug, a homemaker whose kids recently moved out of the house and went to college, hiking the trail was a long-awaited dream that finally came to fruition. Buffalo, a hiker from Kentucky who also completed his AT thru-hike in 2013, discussed his expectations as a sense of challenge, adventure, and a fellowship with nature. Buffalo also hoped to find some crystallizing formation of who he was as a person. Hikers also saw the trail as a way to decompress from stress. Fern explained that hiking was a way to take time away from her busy life as an attorney in New York City and decompress while also participating in a productive activity. For one retired hiker, the trail was an alternative to sitting on the couch and rereading the same books over again.

The majority of the hikers had some previous hiking or camping experience, which contributed to prompting them to do a long-distance backpacking trip. A few hikers also mentioned their family or coworkers' reaction towards them thru-hiking. Families or coworkers generally did not understand why they would subject themselves to something like a thru-hike. Aqualad expressed, "My family members don't get it and not many people would get it." Upon leaving his job, Mash shared that he told his coworkers, "Before I quit I said I was gonna be a nomadic forest hobo. That's my job description now." When asked what their response was, he stated, "I mean nobody really gets it. Except for the few people that have actually backpacked and know a little bit about it."

Experience on the Trail

Being in nature

Many people today see the demands of modern life as being distinctly removed from nature. Between school, work, and family life, many people in North American society are not

Table 1. Demographic information of all hikers interviewed

Name	Age	Gender	Residence	Education	Race/ Ethnicity	Employment	Hiked AT/ LT prior	Socioeconomic status	AT/LT completed
Aqualad	20	Male	Québec, Canada	Current Bachelor's	White	student/ barista	yes	somewhat comfortable	beginning
Buffalo	28	Male	Kentucky	Bachelor's	White	cook/ lab technician	yes	somewhat comfortable	completed
Shirt	25	Male	South Carolina	Bachelor's	White	mechanical eng./ no job	yes	very comfortable	3/4 completed
Boondoc	27	Male	Massachusetts	Bachelor's	White	bar manager	no	somewhat comfortable	completed
Mash	31	Male	New York	Bachelor's	White	mechanical eng./ no job	yes	comfortable	3/4 completed
Pilot	27	Male	Massachusetts	Bachelor's	White	pilot	yes	very comfortable	completed
Route	25	Female	Georgia	Bachelor's	White	legal proofreader	yes	very comfortable	3/4 completed
Ladybug	53	Female	Maryland	Bachelor's	White	homemaker	yes	very comfortable	3/4 completed
Fern	29	Female	New York	Law degree	White	attorney	yes	very comfortable	3/4 completed
Grove	25	Male	South Carolina	High school	White	none	no	comfortable	3/4 completed
Lightning Shank	19	Male	Connecticut	High school	White	none	no	comfortable	beginning
Blister	18	Male	Virginia	High school	Mixed, White/ Filipino	none	yes	very comfortable	beginning
Straggler	65	Male	Washington DC	Juris Doctor	White	retired	yes	very comfortable	beginning

required to spend time outside. Long-distance backpacking is a way to do something different, an activity that contrasts with our modern lives. Upon asking the thru-hikers how spending extended periods of time in nature while on the trail affected them, many responses ensued: it elicited feelings of connection to themselves, their thoughts, their moods, and sleep; increased their sense of spirituality and brought them into the present moment; and disconnected them from modern influences such as technology, phones, and the media.

Buffalo described the effect that nature had on him as connecting him to the natural world, or what he described as "primal nature" and "a sense of evolutionary heritage": "It definitely made me a happier person. And I think I have to associate being in nature with being active in nature. I sweated through the summer and walked through the rain in the spring. I knew the seasons, but I had never really experienced the subtle changes between them. The world is just so alive. That was kind of humbling."

Lightning Shank discussed how spending time in nature on the trail simplified his life by forcing him to prioritize his primary needs such as food, water, and shelter over unnecessary and luxurious secondary needs. Fern discussed how living outside away from cellular and internet service forced her to disconnect from being immediately engaged with news media, which lessened her emotional reaction to the information. For Ladybug, being in nature brought her more into the present moment because she needed to be alert and tend to her basic survival means. Many of the hikers also discussed how their waking and sleeping pattern is enforced by the cycles of sunrise and sunset. In general, hikers expressed the positive effects that nature had on their overall mental, emotional, and spiritual states. By spiritual, I do not mean in a religious sense, but rather a connection to the natural world or nourishing the human spirit by connecting to nature. As Pilot stated, "I have been always convinced that the basis of my spirituality revolves around nature. I feel most connected to it when I'm deepest in nature… like when I find myself alone just gazing out at a vast landscape."

Gaining confidence

Almost all of the thru-hikers that I interviewed discussed how the trail has helped them gain confidence in outdoor skills, self-reliance, and self-confidence as they became more proficient in backpacking and overcame obstacles on the trail. Fern stated how thru-hiking has built her outdoor skills and has sparked her interest in becoming more proficient in other outdoor activities, such as skiing, rock climbing, bike packing, and fishing. Pilot talked about how hiking the trail taught him that goals can be accomplished through breaking tasks down into manageable sections and to keep going until the goal is achieved. Ladybug mentioned how her experience has instilled a trust that things will work out instead of worrying about how things can go wrong.

In contrast to building confidence, hiking the trail allows time to self-reflect, which may provoke confusion through experiencing thoughts and anxieties about the future, especially for young adults contemplating their lives and careers. Overall, hikers primarily discussed how building backpacking skills and physical endurance transferred into generalized feelings of self-reliance and self-confidence.

Creating community on the trail and trail families

Likened to the community on the trail and the spirit of that community is a term used in anthropology and the social sciences: communitas. Communitas refers to an unstructured group of people who have an intense spirit of community cultivated by a shared common experience, usually through a rite of passage. Members of the communitas are also viewed as being equal (Turner 1969). The community of thru-hikers on the trail is a diverse group coming from different stages in life with an array of backgrounds that are sharing the same experience. Hikers spend all day walking alongside other hikers, sharing food and other resources, gathering together at the end of a long day to eat dinner, sometimes have a fire, and go to bed. Hikers' process of self-reflection is also embedded in a community, as seen when hikers reflect on their experiences of communal bonding through talking, sharing, and being part of a trail family. When asked about the community on the trail, hikers expressed positive characteristics such as hikers being genuine, kind, and generous.

Blister's observation of how community is formed on the AT is through people sharing a difficult experience with one another. Shirt discussed how strong bonds are formed between hikers through spontaneous, open, and friendly interactions and by means of walking alongside another hiker all day. Route, a young AT thru-hiker from Georgia, discussed how the trail brings a sense of identity that is unified by the mere fact that everyone is out on the trail enduring the same conditions. Route also talked about her experience of hikers showing kindness and compassion towards one another regardless of their different backgrounds, social status, or belief systems. Route stated:

> I think out here we actually have way more in common than we don't. People are a lot less judgmental on the trail. People are much more accepting and compassionate and always willing to help out here. Because I think we all know the level of suck that everyone's going through. In real life people

> aren't that way. I feel like you really get in touch with yourself and humanity out here. I feel like out here people are in the rawest form of themselves.

Fern also talked about the concept of a trail family or "tramily," which are close bonds formed between hikers often coming from very different backgrounds. Two of the men that Fern was hiking with had G.E.D.s while she was an attorney in NYC, and the other hiker was a dermatologist who attended Harvard. She noted how she normally did not have meaningful conversations with people who are not at least college-educated in her "real life" (i.e. life prior to the trail).

Pilot further discussed the communal experience of sharing that occurs between members of trail families. Pilot states:

> The four of us all hiked together as this little posse for a long time. We had this little communal thing going on, as we would just share everything. When you're isolated like that and you don't have immediate access to a store, sharing helps. That has modified the way I feel about individual possessions, generosity, and thinking about other people. It builds community when a group of people takes care of each other like that.

Interestingly, Straggler, an older hiker who identified as an introvert, mentioned how he expected to have more time alone on the trail; instead, he discovered how populated the trail was and how there is more community on the trail than in his everyday retired life. His statement displays an alternative perspective on the trail community.

In general, hikers reported a renewed sense of humanity through their experiences with other hikers and those who support the trail community. Buffalo, who had hiked the trail six years prior to this study, looked back on his experience of community on the trail, which revived his faith in people. Buffalo commented: "My perspective on inner human connectivity shifted massively. I began to find a lot more value in small group connections. I find much more value in building and maintaining relationships with people that share a space with you."

Enduring discomfort

Long-distance backpacking on the Appalachian Trail or Long Trail presents a set of challenges in contrast to everyday life. Throughout my discussions with the thru-hikers, a recurring theme that arose was the hikers' ability to endure physical discomfort on the trail. Fern discussed how adjusting to the freezing temperatures at night during the early months on the trail was difficult. Fern also endured numerous physical ailments while on the trail, including blisters that lasted 300 miles and hurt ankles that she supported with ankle braces. Three quarters into her hike, she stated that she had dealt with her conditions and had now transcended the hiking pains and was comfortable hiking. Blister discussed enduring discomfort and being comfortable with the uncomfortable. Buffalo shared a memory of enduring the freezing cold days on the trail and realizing how if he wanted to reach the end of the trail, Mount Katahdin, then he would have to persist through the situation.

Mash reflected that "there are no easy days on the AT. Some are just more fun than others." While on the trail, the hikers learn to endure discomforts such as blisters, joint pain, freezing temperatures, and rain. Persisting through challenges that arise on the trail plays a role in hikers' forming confidence as they gain a new self-appreciation when they overcome physical discomfort.

Personal Reflections

Insights on the trail

Many of the hikers shared personal reflections that they had while on the trail. Younger hikers reflected on their future aspirations while older hikers tended towards a review of their lives. As previously noted, many of the thru-hikers attempted the trail during a transition in their lives. The trail provided them with time and space to be free from distractions and concentrate on their own thoughts and feelings about important matters. Some discovered that spending time with themselves to reflect on their life or what was to come was just what they needed.

Pilot discussed that having time with his thoughts allowed him to develop a way to consider the different courses that he could

take in his life. In his everyday life, he would usually become distracted by something else and move onto another idea. Shirt reflected that one can deliberately change one's experience through positive thinking. He also discussed thinking bigger in terms of the things that he wanted to do, and then taking the leap towards doing those things instead of just dreaming about them. For him, this meant becoming self-employed. Blister, who shared that he had bipolar disorder, realized that he enjoyed the effect hiking had on quieting his mind. When asked about any personal reflections he had while on the trail, Mash pulled out a little notepad in which he wrote his personal insights. "Every year I think it's important for us to take time to slow down. Too much of our lives are spent rushing to nothing. Life is a struggle and it's about simple things like a beautiful view, lunch with friends."

Many hikers also discussed how only carrying one's essential needs on their back made them more inclined to a minimalist philosophy. They translated this reflection into thinking about their lives back home, where they felt they could do with much fewer possessions. As Pilot recognized, "just all the extraneous crap that you'll hold onto during your life. Like when I got back I went into my room and was like what is all this crap. I don't need any of this. I just became way more minimalist in terms of what possessions I wanted to hang on to."

Trail culture versus life before and after the trail

The culture on the trail is a subculture in which there is a unifying identity between members who belong to it and a set of norms and values that are different from dominant North American society. As discussed earlier, this new group bond and altered values and norms connects with Turner's (1969) concept of communitas. Hikers' individual experiences may vary depending on who they are hiking with, as there is no written rulebook for the trail; however, many of the norms are an unspoken set of values that hikers abide by while on the trail. One value thru-hikers on the AT/LT abide by is the motto "Leave No Trace," which simply means to pack everything one brings on the trail back out with them for proper disposal.

Hikers on the trail form a tight-knit community that lends itself to being kind and considerate towards other hikers. When asked about how the culture on the trail differs from the culture hikers typically experience in everyday life, the hikers mainly focused on how open, laidback, considerate, friendly, and more tolerant of free expression hikers were on the trail. Hikers also discussed how other hikers were a lot less judgmental than people in everyday life. There is a lower standard of personal hygiene on the trail due to the lack of amenities available. Shirt points out, "Nobody really cares what you're doing as long as you're not affecting others. Nobody is judging if you hike five or fifty miles that day." Another hiker, Boondoc, talks about how hikers pile up in the shelters, sleeping next to a stranger in the middle of the woods, and how in everyday life that is far from what is considered normal. Buffalo stated:

> There's a fraternity amongst thru-hikers that comes from suffering together and sharing a unique experience together. On the trail people assume different identities and it comes out in the trail names. There's definitely less of an expectation for a poised presentation of yourself. People forgo a lot of pleasantries or things that might not necessarily be polite, like belching or flatulating without hesitation. The trail definitely encourages you to be a genuine form of yourself and to just experience the trail in a way that responds to you. There's a sense of social liberation on the trail. Like there's no one really readily observing or judging you, but almost encouraging you to be free.

Buffalo's reflection suggests communitas in how thru-hikers on the AT share a unique experience together that facilitates a strong bond. The liberating freeform expression on the trail also displays the spirit of the community that is encouraged on the trail.

Mash talked about how it is not very often that you are surrounded by a community of people chasing their dreams: people who have made sacrifices to be out on the trail. Mash also referred to the hiker community as "a band of hobos walking together" because nobody who is thru-hiking is currently working or owns a

house while on the trail. This suggests the removal of common markers of social status such as jobs and housing. Also noting the lack of socioeconomic markers, Ladybug stated:

> The community at home is more based on geographic location, socioeconomics, and who's doing the same things. Out here you could be sitting around at a picnic table having just met people that you all have this common thread, of such a powerful experience. You could have some 20-year-old from France and a 32-year-old from Denmark and me being a 53-year-old and a 70-year-old guy or something and we're all just chatting. And in real life that probably wouldn't happen unless you're like in a support group and you're forced to come together.

Pilot mentioned that the absence of resources on the trail makes it necessary for hikers to have each other's backs, which reinforces the trail families. When hikers realize that food and resources are scarce, they are more apt to take care of one another. It also makes resources much more valuable, whereas for most hikers, in everyday life food and supplies are in excess and therefore are much more disposable, causing these items to lose their value. Another notable response from Pilot was that hikers are much friendlier than people in his everyday life: “Everybody on the AT is very open. There is way less of this bullshit of everybody intrinsically hating each other and not wanting to talk to one another. In Boston, if you talk to a stranger, five out of ten times that's not going to go well. On the AT if you want to start like a 30-minute conversation, anybody was down at any time.”

Fern also mentioned one group of hikers she found herself in who had the motto "no goals." This can be seen as a reaction to how efficacy, productivity, and goals are fundamental driving values of modern North American culture. This motto displays how trail life is radically different, almost an antithesis, to everyday life in modern culture.

However, not all aspects of trail culture were viewed positively. As Fern points out, the trail is mostly white, masculine, and privileged, and one unspoken rule is to not talk about politics:

> There's a real attitude about no politics on the trail or don't talk about race, religion, or whatever on trail. I understand the value of doing that and that we're out here to have a certain experience. But I find it uncomfortable because I think it's a really privileged position to take. I don't like that people can say that in order to avoid difficult conversations. I think the trail is very masculine, it's very white, it's privileged. Out here there's kind of a culture of putting it to rest and not having the conversation, in a way that gets under my skin.

Pilot also discussed how trail culture promotes many male hikers to grow out their beards, build muscles, drink a lot of beer, and carry large and heavy items such as watermelons from towns onto the trail.

Fern and Pilot’s statements display that even though there is an ideal of equality amongst thru-hikers, which aligns with the dissolution of social status typical of communitas, the trail as a whole is still highly masculine. While individual experiences may vary, this gender inequality creates a contradiction between ideology and practice.

Hikers’ views of society

During the interviews, I asked the thru-hikers about their views of modern society in North America—many responses were negative. Buffalo discussed how his view of society had become more calloused over time and how there was something to be gained by being removed from it for the six months while he was on the trail. Buffalo discussed the divergence between institutional bureaucracy versus hiking the trail. He said that if you want to hike the AT, you just physically do it; you can succeed as a result of your own actions in contrast to institutions where extensive certifications are required to get credentialed for a job. Shirt shared his view:

> I have just been reaffirmed that people are trapped because they want to trap themselves. When you do this you meet so many people who are like I wish I could do that or people live vicariously through social media. And it might not be the AT for most these people but they have something they've wanted to do their whole lives, but

> instead of following their dream, they make excuses. I understand I have the privilege, but there are people with the same opportunities as me that are doing the same rat race bullshit that everybody else is. So I have sympathy for people but at the same time sometimes it's useful to grab them and shake them and be like you can do this too. Just don't wait till you're dead.

Shirt's statement suggests that there are multiple social realties in which one is able to make conscious choices about different paths in life and decide which reality to accept. This speaks to how an experience like thru-hiking the AT facilitates a proactive mindset amongst thru-hikers and encourages those with the means to do so to continue exercising their ability to pursue their dreams and goals after thru-hiking

Route also discussed how life on the trail contrasted with modern society: "I think everybody in the world needs to come hike the AT just because it's raw, it's real. There's no façade to hide behind. No money, no car, no job, no marriage, whatever. It's just depressing thinking about real life. The closer we get to Maine the more I'm like don't make me go back!" Route's statement connects to liminality in that her pre-trail life no longer exists; the trail is an intermediate phase and she had not yet begun reintegrating into her post-trail life. Route's discussion of the trail as raw in the sense that there is no social structure to mask one's identity speaks to how the trail displays Turner's (1969) concept of anti-structure. With the absence of typical indicators of social status or success while thru-hiking, the trail may be viewed as a revolt against the structure that is imposed on people in everyday society. Route's statement also exemplifies the phenomenological view of identity construction in that the trail has exposed her to an alternative social reality that she can choose to accept or not. In doing so, she then internalizes her chosen reality, and through this intentional choice, either constructs a new identity or reverts back to her previous identity.

Overall, the hikers' views mostly demonstrated how the trail was in juxtaposition to their usual roles in society. They talked about how the trail renewed their faith in humanity and provided them with a sense of freedom in ways that being involved in their everyday social interactions did not. Hikers discussed the culture on the trail almost as finding a new sense of reality apart from the norms of society: a stripping off of all the structures that keep people apart from nature and one another. At the same time, this itself becomes a part of the structure on the trail.

Impact of Hiking the Trail

The hikers I spoke with who were about a week into their hike were uncertain of how the trail was going to impact their lives, whereas the hikers who were three-quarters of the way through their hike or had completed their hike discussed how the trail had built their self-reliance, confidence, and self-directedness. Most of the hikers talked about feeling mentally and physically stronger from hiking the trail. Many hikers also mentioned that thru-hiking reaffirmed previously held beliefs about themselves and what they are capable of.

Buffalo considers the trail to be one of the greatest experiences of his life. He shared that in his office he has three things on the wall: his Appalachian Trail certificate, his Pacific Crest Trail certificate, and a photo of his deceased mother. Buffalo also mentioned how his sense of identity was formed by achieving his goal of reaching the end of the trail and by the new experiences, people, and places he interacted with while on the trail.

Reintegration and changes made

I asked the hikers how they thought they would integrate their experience back into their everyday lives and what lifestyle changes they anticipated making after completing their hike. Most of the respondents immediately mentioned their hesitations of acclimating back into everyday life. Hikers were concerned about losing the state of mind they cultivated on the trail and dealing with the monotony and stress of everyday life, which included work for most of the hikers. Some even mentioned their fear of post-trail depression, which is a topic discussed on the trail. Every hiker mentioned decreasing their caloric intake and increasing exercise in post-trail life. Hikers also discussed how living with the motto "Leave No Trace" has made them want to live in a more environmentally conscious manner. Hikers who

completed the trail talked about getting rid of clothing and other belongings post-trail. Many hikers discussed how the trail has developed their attitude towards putting dreams into action rather than postponing them. Grove stated that he was going to pursue more things for happiness rather than just money or social status. Ladybug shared her interest in planning another thru-hike to get her through the dark days after the trail. Lightning Shank said he was not going to start paying for Netflix again and that he was going to try and simplify his life to reflect the way of life on the trail.

The three hikers, Boondoc, Buffalo, and Pilot, who hiked the AT six years prior felt their experience had long term benefits and that thru-hiking was one of the most significant experiences in their lives. They believed it had given them a sustained sense of confidence, self-reliance, and grit. These hikers also mentioned their continued interest in hiking, completing other thru-hikes, and trail conservation values. In contrast to these long term effects of thru-hiking the AT, when Buffalo was asked how his views on society changed from this experience, he replied, "I think that for a time they did change and then I slowly became more calloused as I reintegrated back into society. I felt that there was something to be gained from not participating in the rigidity of the American lifestyle for so long." Buffalo also discussed how initially upon reintegrating into the larger society he had felt like an outsider because others could not relate to this radical experience he had just emerged from. This is an example of reincorporation, a post-liminal phase, which is the third stage of a rite of passage as explained by Turner (1969).

Discussion of Interviews with Long-Distance Hikers

Analysis of the 13 interviews conducted for this study suggests that hikers understand thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail or Long Trail as a way to navigate a transition in their life, decompress from the stress of a job, gain perspective or get to know themselves better, take an opportune time to fulfill a personal dream, and to experience a challenge, freedom, and adventure. Long-distance backpacking is also viewed as resistance to contemporary society, an activity that contrasts with our modern lives. Upon asking the thru-hikers how spending extended periods of time in nature on the trail affected them, many described how hiking elicited feelings of a connection to themselves and nature. Hikers stated how hiking and being in nature helped stabilize their thoughts, moods, and sleep. Some mentioned how being in nature brought them into the present moment and even elicited a sense of spirituality. Hikers also mentioned that being disconnected from modern influences such as technology, phones, and the media had a positive effect on them and how being in nature connected them to what one hiker described as a more "primal" sense of themselves. They further explained how being in nature simplified life down to the basics and allowed them to let go of extraneous possessions and influences.

Thru-hiking had a positive impact on hikers' self-perceptions, making them feel mentally, emotionally, and physically stronger. Hikers discussed gaining confidence as they became more proficient in their outdoor skills, increased their physical endurance, and built connections to the community on the trail. Hikers' feelings of self-confidence and self-reliance translated into how they thought about other areas of their lives. Their boost in confidence inspired them to dream bigger and take action towards their dreams, knowing that they could set a goal and achieve it by focusing on one step at a time.

In this study, phenomenology was a helpful theoretical perspective to understand how hikers make sense of the juxtaposition of the culture and community on the AT/LT in contrast to their everyday lives off the trail. This exposure to an alternative culture on the trail allowed hikers to question their lives prior to the trail and formulate a new sense of identity and reality through internalizing the culture on the AT/LT. Hikers displayed this by adopting trail names and through assimilating to the unspoken values of the trail. The data suggests multiple experiences on the trail, including both individual self-reflection and communal bonding. As the experiences of thru-hikers vary, individuals choose how to respond to the particular situations they face on the trail, whether it involves adjusting their mindset,

enduring pain and bad weather, stopping at a trail town, or setting their own schedule and goals. Individual decision making is a cultural norm on the trail that is reinforced by both hikers' expectations of life on the trail and interactions with other hikers.

Communitas was formed on the trail through the creation of an ad-hoc community by virtue of hiking and sleeping next to other hikers. Through this process, "trail families" that travel as little tribes are formed. Hikers discussed members of the community as being genuine, outgoing, and accepting. Non-judgment and trust are valued on the trail, which brings people from all different backgrounds, belief systems, and jobs together. Generosity and sharing are also encouraged as a tight-knit community is formed and resources are limited. The complexity of life on the trail is reflected in the contrast between the social and individual aspects of trail life: while hikers' experiences are embedded in communitas and the unique bonds they form within their trail families, many undergo processes of individual reflection and identity reconstruction simultaneously.

Long-distance backpacking on the AT/LT presents a different set of challenges in contrast to everyday life. Hikers learned the ability to overcome challenges such as poor weather, physical ailments, and mental and/or emotional struggles while on the trail. Hikers discussed having the time for self-reflection and being in nature as a rejuvenating healing process. Their insights on the trail reflected on the importance of slowing down, having a sense of personal agency, and the benefits of taking time away from distractions to reflect upon one's life.

The culture on the Appalachian Trail or Long Trail can be viewed as a subculture in which there is a unifying identity between members who belong to it; it is a subculture with its own set of norms and values different from the dominant society. There is no written rulebook for the trail—many of the norms are an unspoken set of values that hikers abide by on the trail, such as the motto "Leave No Trace."

Hikers also discussed how the lack of resources on the trail increased the value of material goods in contrast to modern life where resources are in excess and more disposable, making them less valuable. Fern mentioned how one of her trail families had a rule of "no goals," which can be seen as a rejection of the emphasis on goal-driven behavior in contemporary society. This connects to liminality in the sense that hikers undergo a restructuring of their identity, values, and behaviors while on the trail. In turn, this allows them to formulate a new way of life as they end up identifying more with the culture on the trail compared to their previous way of life.

Hikers' views of society included skepticism towards larger institutions and encouraged belief in grassroots organizations. Hikers' views mostly reflected on the juxtaposition between life on the trail and being involved in society. They talked about how the trail renewed their faith in humanity and provided them with a sense of freedom in ways that being involved in society did not. As suggested by a phenomenological analysis, hikers discussed the culture on the trail almost as if they had found a new sense of reality apart from the norms of society. For them, the AT/LT contrasts with mainstream society in that people are considered more equal on the trail: there are no façades such as money, a job, car, or marriage to hide behind. However, as Fern discussed the idea of equality that is embedded in communitas and on the trail is contradicted by the reality that the trail is highly masculinized, white, and privileged.

Thru-hiking impacted hikers by building their self-reliance, confidence, and self-directedness. Hikers reported being reaffirmed of their previously held beliefs about themselves and what they are capable of. Hikers noted that time on the trail made them more relaxed and community-oriented. Many hikers also discussed how carrying only one's essential needs on their back taught them to become a minimalist. Hikers also noted becoming more environmentally conscious.

Hikers shared their concerns about reacclimating back into everyday life, losing the state of mind that they cultivated on the trail, and dealing with the monotony and stress of everyday life. The three thru-hikers who were interviewed six years after completing the AT discussed having prolonged feelings of

confidence, self-reliance, and grit from having been tested through their experience on the trail.

Concluding Thoughts

By providing an in-depth analysis of hikers' personal reflections about hiking, this research contributes to our knowledge of how hikers make sense of their experiences long-distance backpacking the Appalachian and Long Trail. Unlike previous studies, this study also introduces the concept of phenomenology as a theoretical lens and utilizes the analytical concepts of liminality and communitas. This theoretical approach illuminates how hikers form a new sense of identity and reality on the trail, as well as an altered perception of their prior social roles and activities.

While demographic information regarding gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status was collected, examining how these variables may alter the meaning and experience of long-distance hiking is not the main focus of this research, mainly due to the limited number of participants. Notably, unlike earlier studies of thru-hikers, not all participants in this study identified as white—one identified as white/African American and another as white/Filipino. An analysis of racial and ethnic diversity, gender, and socioeconomics of the population of long-distance hikers is an important area for continued research. Climate change could also be a theme of further research of thru-hikers on the Appalachian Trail or Long Trail due to the impacts of increasing droughts, wildfires, unpredictable winters, rising sea levels, and other natural disasters on hiking conditions (Sarae 2020). Finally, future research could continue to expand upon the role of personal reflection in facilitating meaningful change by interviewing hikers periodically for several years after completing their hikes.

With regard to my personal experience completing this study, going back out on the trail and interacting with the hikers after six years refreshed my sense of the spirit of hikers on the trail. I was delighted to still feel welcomed into the community as I asked thru-hikers for their participation in this research. Hikers were more than willing to participate and showed thoughtfulness in their responses. It was also wonderful to reach out to fellow hikers from 2013 to hear about their experiences of the trail as well as to relive some shared experiences. Further, this research renewed my own inclination to take the time to retreat into nature in order to slow down and self-reflect.

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Medicalization and Fear: A Midwifery View of the Phenomenon and the Backlash

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of medicalization in the United States is something that midwives must deal with on a daily basis, and it has far-reaching consequences for women's health. This article examines the culture of birth in the U.S. and how medicalization has manifested itself as a social norm from the perspectives of working certified nurse midwives in hospitals and birth centers. It explores the philosophy of the medicalized birth, the impact of technology on the perpetuation of medicalization in United States' culture, and the fear of this phenomenon that midwives are starting to see in practice, which adversely affects their work. This article argues that advances in and dependence on obstetrical technology have enabled medicalization to continue and created a response of fear from women who worry this phenomenon will negatively affect their birthing experience. My research demonstrates that midwives recognize that the dominance of technology in health care has shaped not only how birth has become medicalized, but also how women are responding to this "technocratic birth" and how navigating women's fears about hyper-medicalization has become a central part of midwives' practice. Through Michel Foucault's theory of biopower and Robbie Davis-Floyd's idea of the "technocratic birth," this article explains how medicalization depends on technology and why midwives are seeing an adverse reaction from women who fear these trends.

Keywords: birth; medicalization; midwifery; women's health; United States

> You know things are done to people, instead of decisions being made with people, like a hallmark of midwifery care is being with women and not doing things to them…like, that's an important part of midwifery education. I think that's like most midwives would really talk about how much of their practice is around helping women feel heard and understood and participate in decision making processes and the owners of their own experience and care, and those things. And that it's not that you would never hear a physician talk about those things, and I think that's very unfair to suggest that ob-gyns don't, but it's not part of their practice to the same extent. I mean, one way of sort of talking about it and thinking about it is that, like, for a physician everything is wrong with the pregnancy until proven right and the only way to be proven right is that everything is okay is to have a baby, so for midwives everything is healthy and normal until proven otherwise. (Midwife Interview 2)

In the past twenty years, the demand for midwives to attend births has steadily increased. From the year 1989 to 2018, the number of births attended by certified nurse midwives in the U.S. rose from 3.3% to 9.0% (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020; Declercq 2015). The midwifery model, which incorporates the patient-centered healthcare model, and the biomedical model of pregnancy or the focus on the body's physical processes, characterized by hyper-medicalization, are seen as competing models within the U.S. system. "Medicalized birth" is the phenomenon where medical interventions are viewed as routine during childbirth in Western countries, specifically the United States, without evidence of constant effectiveness. This is illustrated by the high rate of cesarean sections, high rates of inductions, and reliance on technological interventions during the birthing experience (Johanson, Newburn, and Macfarlane 2002). Due to women's increased desire for control and decision-making power over their birth process, midwives see the opposite side of medicalization with women going against medical advice for fear of falling victim to a medicalized birth with unnecessary interventions. I argue that medicalization continues in the United States because of the dependence that birthing techniques have on technology, which in turn has created a unique form of resistance as women push back against the biomedical model during their birth experience.

Midwives are typically older women who have already had their own children, located in all parts of the world to assist women in their community going through the childbirth process (Connerton 2012). As technology has changed throughout time, specifically with the invention of forceps, men began to enter the field of birth and eventually created the field of obstetrics, which was born in Europe and then made its way to the United States (Brodsky 2008). Since men were the only ones who could go to medical school and use these technologies in the 1800s, this signaled a shift away from the traditional birth model of a midwife attendant helping women give birth at home toward birthing with surgeons in hospitals who used the newest technology of the day (Capitulo 1998). Surgeons focused their efforts on gaining upper-class women as clientele for hospital births, knowing these individuals could pay for their services and left midwives to continue providing care for less fortunate families (Capitulo 1998). This focus on specific consumers created a connotation of midwives as being for the poorer cohorts of society while male obstetric providers served the rich, which these physicians then exploited to increase their already high status in society (Capitulo 1998).

Male surgeons began to insist that it was safer and healthier for women to have their babies in the hospitals because they had access to pain relief and new technologies. They eventually went so far as to demonize mothers who decided against this model, pushing

midwives further from hospitals (Connerton 2012). However, midwives never fully disappeared due to their use by rural and low-income women. This led the Frontier School for Nursing, an early school for nurses and midwives that focused on rural populations, to incorporate midwives into their nursing programs, which kept the field going throughout the middle of the twentieth century (Connerton 2012). During the 1970s and 1980s, there was another shift as women began wanting to have their children in birth centers and to be attended by midwives in response to the hyper-medicalization happening in hospitals reliant on technologies (Capitulo 1998). Women and midwives began criticizing certain aspects of the hyper-medicalization of birth, including aggressive technological dominance over the birthing process that left women with no control over the process their bodies go through. Today, women of higher socioeconomic status have more agency to seek out and to pay for midwives as attendants to their births, but this has not changed the overall trend of women in the United States deciding to give birth in hospitals with a doctor (Martin et al. 2019).

According to federal statistics of birth and death data in the United States, the percentage of the total babies delivered by certified nurse midwives is 9.1%, with the rest of the births assisted by physicians (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020; Martin et al. 2019). In 2017, the percentage of women who gave birth outside of a hospital, whether that be at home or in a birth center, is 1.61% (MacDorman and Declercq 2019). According to the CDC (2019), in 2018, the percentage of all births in the United States that were done by C-section was 31.9%. The World Health Organization (2015) made it clear in 1985 and then reaffirmed in 2015 that countries should aim for a C-section rate from 10-15%, as anything higher does not improve outcomes for mothers. These statistics of procedures happening in hospitals that depend on the newest technologies indicate the medicalization that continues and why women are fearful of this affecting their birth. This picture of birth in the United States illustrates the rise of medicalization due to a dependence on technology. Moreover, this process of medicalization will demonstrate why midwives see women, at times dangerously, reject a biomedical interference in their birthing experience.

Definitions

Medicalization is the change of a normal process into a pathology, bringing an experience into the realm of western medicine and subjecting it to the authority of medical professionals (Parry 2008). One midwife explains how she "think[s] we're so quick to like test 60 things [when] we really could just be testing one thing, and we're not like… we're over testing, we're over monitoring, or over inducing. That's, that's what medicalization means to me" (Midwife Interview 8). In the United States, birth is a cultural phenomenon wherein people treat the childbearing process as a move away from a normal bodily state, one which requires constant medical care under the purview of the medical establishment because it is considered dangerous. Once a natural process goes through medicalization, it then becomes subject to the authority of medical institutions and professionals, whom we look toward for answers about our conditions (Parry 2008). Birth becomes medicalized through the fear and risk associated with it in U.S. culture. These events are then described in medical terminology that only doctors understand; people are seen less as individuals in a cultural context and instead viewed as patients through a medical gaze (Parry 2008). For example, midwives support birth starting spontaneously and on its own, without medical intervention; however, we have the technology to induce birth and many providers use this if the patient requests the procedure. Additionally, the constant use of fetal heart monitors during birth rather than using them to check in intermittently as midwives typically do is a form of medicalization. All of these actions create a conceptualization of the female body as a machine and remove a woman from the happenings of her experience (R. Davis-Floyd 1987). These differences in parts of the birth process affect midwives navigating the world of medicalization in the United States.

Midwifery is not always well known within the United States as there are multiple different

types within the profession, and they differ in what type of training they go through. A certified nurse midwife (CNM) is an individual who has gone to a graduate-level midwifery program that is accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education (ACME) (American College of Midwives n.d.). Every CNM must pass a national examination that is administered by the American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB) to be able to practice in all 50 states (American College of Midwives n.d.). A certified professional midwife (CPM), or lay midwife, has gone through more of an apprenticeship and is certified by the North American Registry of Midwives (American College of Midwives n.d.). Each state has different laws and rules about how CPMs can practice. This research deals mainly with CNMs, but it is important to differentiate within the profession itself. A birth center is a space that is outside of the hospital where women can pay to deliver their babies and is typically run by midwives and other birth attendants, such as doulas and nurses. A birth attendant is a very general term for any health professional who gives care to a mother and newborn during and immediately following a birth. These services are typically paid for by insurance if the plan covers a midwife, or patients pay out of pocket.

Methods

I conducted seven semi-structured interviews with currently practicing certified nurse midwives. I located the individuals through existing networks with midwives and doulas, which I then continued through snowball sampling. These networks were established through previous research and professional connections. I reached out to them through email, asking them to read and sign a consent form, which was approved by Wake Forest University's Institutional Review Board. Four of the seven have been practicing for at least five years, and three have been practicing midwives for shorter but have been doulas and birth attendants for years prior. All of the participants were women and ranged in age and experience from more recently graduated to practicing for twenty years. Each interview lasted 45 to 75 minutes. All interviews were conducted in person and took place in coffee shops, interviewees' homes, or offices.

The interviews were transcribed and then coded by highlighting quotations and sorting them into different patterns identifying medicalization or the backlash from it. There were a set of questions that worked as a starting point to guide the semi-structured interviews and aimed to get answers pertaining to real-life experiences. These questions encompassed topics such as personal background, professional experience, medicalization issues, and different situations in their daily work. Although this interview experience was daunting at first, these midwives care immensely about their work and were eager to answer my questions, many times answering them during our conversation without me having to ask.

Medicalized Birth and Fear

Medicalization in the United States today has been driven by new technologies that aim to make birth less dangerous and unpredictable, women requesting these new innovations, and physicians suggesting them at higher rates. However, midwives see two sides to this cultural phenomenon. The first side is the typical embodiment of medicalization, where an experience becomes a pathology, that is exemplified by the high rates of C-sections and inductions in the U.S., and the second side is a fear of medicalization that affects the decisions clients make regarding their own health. Multiple midwives in this research pointed out this trend, which can be dangerous for a patient when they turn away from providers' advice about necessary medical care because of their fear of medicalization. Midwives must navigate this medicalized birth in healthcare, as well as addressing the concerns of women who may be so worried about the medicalization of their birth that they do not take the advice of their practitioner.

The Medicalized Birth

Medicalization manifests itself in multiple ways during the birth process, which includes high amounts of inductions, cesarean sections, and the reliance on technology throughout childbirth. In necessary situations these medical advancements are largely beneficial for women, but midwives are advocating for a non-interventionist birth for a mother with no health complications since using these interventions

has the potential to create problematic issues and increase unnecessary procedures. In addition, insurance in this country has contributed to the medical industrial complex with third-party providers deciding how to price certain procedures, which could bring in more money for hospitals. In turn, this can affect what individuals decide as medically necessary in certain situations, due to falsely connecting the high price with better care, and can lead to more interventions, because they bring in more money for the hospital (Conrad and Leiter 2004). In this culture of medicalization, both doctors and patients routinize low-risk individuals giving birth in hospitals and the accepted use of interventions for women.

When I asked an open-ended question about what medicalization brings to mind, one midwife explains that it "made [her] think the medicalization of birth took away all power. Because it's like it's, they have no power, it's your… You're just like a patient who we have to help because you have this chronic disease, for nine months, you know what I mean" (Midwife Interview 3). This quotation exemplifies how medicalization is perceived by midwives working in the medical field today. The medicalized birth views the patient as having an illness that removes the mother from the process and implements the physician as the decision maker by bringing the birth under the purview of the medical establishment. This subtly tells women their feelings and bodily experiences are not normal and that they need to look to the doctor for decisions rather than advocating for their own autonomy.

One key example of medicalization is the use of inductions, which are a pharmaceutical start to birth where a woman is given different hormones to start contractions. Inductions can be used for medical and non-medical reasons. Midwives pride themselves on striving to give their patients the birth that they want because they put the mother at the head of the birth team; however, many women ask for inductions of labor when it may not be necessary. In the United States in 2018, 27.1% of births were induced (Martin et al. 2019). Induction increases the chances that an individual will end up having a C-section, which further aligns the birth experience with the biomedical model's dependence on technological intervention (Ruhl and Bingham 2014). Midwives tend to have lower rates of labor induction and embrace a spontaneous start to labor when they can (Attanasio and Kozhimannil 2018). Patients can also ask to be induced for a non-medical reason, which points to people utilizing the technology that is a part of the biomedical model to control their birth. One midwife encapsulates this issue by describing how her patients have increasingly been asking for inductions:

> It's been a joke right now running [among midwives] that nobody wants spontaneous labor anymore. Everybody wants to induction between 39 and 40 weeks. And, I mean, not all of our patients, but enough that we're just like, "we have another induction?" I recently had to schedule an induction and our doctors sign off like if they agree or not if they're not… if [the patient is] past 41 days then we can just schedule it. With a 39-week induction for a first-time mom, closed cervix, no real reason, she wanted it because she had an ultrasound and they told her the baby looked big so she… The whole thing was silly, [I tried] to talk her out of it. (Midwife Interview 3)

This quotation illustrates how midwives are stuck in a cycle of wanting to give their patients the type of birth that they would like while at the same time having to contend with medicalization and women asking for these interventions when they are unnecessary. There are multiple reasons why a person could be asking for an induction. One of the main motivations is that individuals want to know when their labor will start because this can ease some anxiety of not knowing. Rather than allowing for spontaneous labor, patients want the certainty of knowing when their baby will arrive. The fact that many times the woman is asking for the induction points to Michel Foucault's theory of biopower (Comaroff and Comaroff 2014). Foucault approaches biopower as a form of power that controls the bodies of the population and is adopted by the individual who then self-corrects and disciplines their own actions after medicalization has taken hold in society (Nadesan 2008). This theory gives a reason for why the women and birthing

population themselves perpetuate the medicalization that is already inherent within the system. Individuals are correcting their actions to move away from a natural birth. Women are deciding they want inductions themselves, and this puts them into the hospital to have their child under the purview of the medical establishment.

Many of the midwives in this research reference the ARRIVE study, which looked at whether the outcomes for mothers change if a woman is induced or experiences spontaneous labor. The study found that there is not a huge difference in the outcome of the pregnancy if a mother is induced after 39 weeks or not (Carmichael and Snowden 2019). This study has caused providers to think that inductions are fine to use once a woman has reached full term and would not affect the outcome of the birth. Many midwives were unsure of this study because they are hesitant to move away from a non-interventionist stance on normal birth. This is one of many nuanced examples of the medicalization of birth that continues in the healthcare system because inductions that are not needed for a medical reason contribute to the high number of cesarean sections in the United States.

The high cesarean section rate in the United States is another example of how the medicalization of birth is still prevalent in the healthcare system. With the U.S.'s cesarean section rate being so high, this surgical procedure has become something that midwives have to contend with in their working lives as the numbers rise. In times where there is a danger to the mother or the child, this surgery has saved lives, but the availability of the procedure to providers allows for many of them to move toward it before it becomes necessary, exposing mothers to the heightened risks and unintended consequences that can come with a surgical procedure. Midwives who have been working for many years have seen these numbers increase as they have continued in this field. One midwife explains how she has seen the rise in cesarean section rates firsthand due to medicalization:

> I've seen an increase in the C-section rate. That's really the major change. I took 14 years off. I worked for a couple years and I had my two kids…and sort of got back on the horse and got privileges in the local hospital as well as in the birth center, and I just see … so many more inductions, so many more problems and that bothers me because those problems…Some of them are seen by our increase in knowing more about the body, but some of them are…We're not as healthy maybe as we were 20 years ago, right, or less athletic, or you eat more, and those make more problematic clients. But we also have an increased C-section rate and I think that goes hand in hand with epidurals, and the lack of the ability to treat a woman like she's normal, as opposed to like she's a problem. And I think that's really gotten us in the last 20 years. (Midwife Interview 7)

In the face of continued medicalization, midwives are trying to push back against this cultural phenomenon by using their midwifery model. Birth has been brought into the purview of medical management through interventions such as inductions and cesarean sections, but midwives are in a key position to resist these issues. The technology available that makes inductions and cesarean sections possible plays an overall hand in the perpetuation of medicalization in the U.S. healthcare system.

Technology's Role in Medicalization

The use of technology, such as fetal heart monitors, is intertwined with medicalization and performs a major role in continuing the phenomenon in the United States. The medicalization of birth results in physicians and patients depending on technology for control over the birthing experience, while midwives must work through and avoid the usage of unnecessary technologies that encourage interventions during birth. Midwives can be seen in a negative light for not using these because of the connotation that more technological interventions allow providers and patients to feel a sense of control over the birth, which is an event that is not always predictable. Beginning with the introduction of forceps in the sixteenth century, doctors and surgeons stressed to women that technology that makes birth less of an unknown was accessible only in hospitals, bringing the process of labor into the biomedical model (Sheikh, Ganesaratnam, and Jan 2013). David-Floyd (1994) discusses this

issue by terming it a technocratic birth, which functions as an agent of social control over individuals, by shaping women's actions and decisions during the birthing experience. Midwives find this to be the case when their model of care argues that these technologies are not always needed.

The relationship between technology and medicalization is fostered through the control these tools can give to providers. One midwife describes this in the following way:

> There's also a false sense of security in technology that I feel like, you know, a lot of women go to the hospital because they're being watched, and they're being monitored, and they're being assessed all the time. Because they have the thing on them, and they've got the blood pressure cuff on them, and their IV is going all the time so they're being taken care of. But if you go to the wards you see that nobody's looking at those monitors. They come through and they, you know, look at [a] strip of 20 minutes or the last hour or two and say, "Okay, this looks good." (Midwife Interview 5)

The usage of the term "false sense of security" is very revealing in what midwives feel the downside of the technology can be. Additionally, false positives from these machines can set in motion a host of other technological interventions because people think something is wrong (Bloom, Belfort, and Saade 2016). The invention of these many different tools is a huge leap forward for modern medicine, but they run the risk of detaching providers from the normal process of birth that has been pathologized through medicalization.

Fetal monitoring is a key example of a technology that is a positive tool that can have negative consequences. This tool continues the medicalization process by giving providers a sense of control over the birth process. Birth can be very unpredictable, so tools such as fetal monitoring, which is used to watch the baby's heart rate during labor, can give people a better feeling of what the baby is doing. This tool is considered a standard of care for birth, but constant monitoring can lead to false positives (Bloom, Belfort, and Saade 2016). Midwives tend to use intermittent fetal monitoring, where they look at the baby for twenty minutes and take the machine off for the rest of the hour. Patients see the monitoring as control as well, because birth can be a scary experience. Another midwife explains that:

> it also gives the patient… this sense of like everything's okay so it gives them control over it because they can watch the… We literally sometimes have to turn to the screen off, and people are staring at it they don't even know what they're looking at. They don't know how to read it, they don't know if it's good or bad, but it gives people a sense of control. (Midwife Interview 5)

Despite most women not knowing how to read what is coming out of the fetal heart monitor, seeing the lines gives them a belief they have knowledge that things are progressing normally and this feeling of control over their labor. Labor can be an unpredictable event: the culture of fear surrounding it and the history of providers cautioning women against a non-interventionist birth out of the hospital has led to women depending on these machines to feel safe, because they have a sense of control, as the midwife quoted above indicated. Midwives have to work in situations where women and their fellow providers rely on these machines. A significant part of midwives' work is to find a balance between the safe use of these technologies during birth and the slippery slope of unnecessary interventions.

Technology creates this false sense of security because it allows for providers to measure and test throughout the birth. Because women in the United States are having fewer children, the monetary investment into birth is deemed as necessary and the accessibility of obstetric technologies is seen as an assurance of a healthy birth (De Vries 1985). Midwives do not depend on all of the new tools that obstetrics holds in high esteem. This decision can have negative consequences for the midwifery profession because of their belief that birth has the ability to progress without technological assistance (De Vries 1985). Many women want these tools because they want to feel more in control over their labor and birth, which is why they choose the hospital with a physician as a place to give birth over

midwifery. While today some midwives work in hospitals, consumers continue to overwhelmingly put their money into obstetrics in hospitals, which could take away income for midwives. In hospitals there is a veneration of technology, which comes into contrast with midwifery non-interventionism and is perpetuated through the ideals of safety associated with technology's use and consumer ideology (Wendland 2007). Consumers want to pay the most money to receive the best care, and while these may not always equate, people continue to spend on obstetrics and not on midwifery. Midwives I interviewed suggested that physicians' dependence on technology, a feature of the biomedical model, could stem in part from constant testing during the birth process.

Technology can remove a woman even further from listening to her body, bringing individuals further under the purview of the medical establishment by giving providers more power. By depending on technological interventions, women look to the doctor to interpret the medical outcomes from these machines and fear trusting their body's sensations. Women in labor are excluded as knowledgeable about their own bodies in situations where they have been excluded from the labor process (R. Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997). A midwife in this research describes the sensations and stress that the technocratic birth process can make individuals feel when creating a barrier between a woman and the non-interventionist model:

> I mean, yeah, it's not, it's not useful, it's not necessary, it creates a sense of I mean… I feel like it…it removes the woman from the natural process of birth, because now you've got IV and blood pressure and you know some the pulse [oxygen] and you can't move because when you move then the baby goes off the monitor and people come in because they see that the baby's off the monitor and we got to do something about that, you know, and there's just, I mean I can't imagine having a sensation that you have to use all your strength [to] pay attention to…And having something squeezing my belly constantly, and then moving, and then people coming in and readjusting it while I'm… I mean if that happened to me now I'd be like, "God, geez!", you know, and of course women can't handle it, of course they're going to get an epidural to remove themselves another step. And then the epidural creates the whole cascade of interventions. (Midwife Interview 5)

These technological interventions are features of the modern obstetric environment and contribute to the technocratic birth experience because they remove the patient further from their body and give control to those who can use these tools (R. Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997). The cutting-edge technology championed in the biomedical model can remove the patient further from the experience of her birth, handing over the decision making to the doctor who can interpret the machineries. These technologies have the potential to keep women safe and bring about positive outcomes if they are used as tools when necessary and not just because they are available and accessible.

Technology has facilitated the medicalization of birth through the development of tools that only doctors in hospitals can use; consequently, women are reassured that the safest birth is in a place where these machines are available. Physicians and patients depend on technology to give them control over the spontaneous thing that is labor and childbirth, while midwives, who want to keep to a non-invasive model of birth, can receive criticism because they do not want to use these technologies all the time. However, as individuals become more aware of the problems that the unnecessary use of technologies can cause, individuals can endanger themselves by ignoring medical advice in an attempt to avoid this.

The Fear of Medicalization

The medicalization of birth can be dangerous for patients and compromising to midwives when it results in patients rejecting the use of necessary technologies and providers' advice. The medicalization of birth has created a fear among some women that certain interventions will lead to more interference, eventually ending in a C-section. This fear leads to patients being less likely to trust and accept recommendations from their provider, resulting in potentially dangerous situations. Women are trying to take back the decision making and

leadership role in their birth. Margaret MacDonald (2011), an anthropologist, explains this trend when she states, "the logics of caring and choice emerge as key determinants of the naturalness of birth within midwifery. This is best illustrated when medical technology, nature's erstwhile foe, enters the conversation or, quite literally, the labor room" (4). This overarching anxiety of medicalization stemming from the loss of control has led to problems of patients having their babies outside of the hospital when they need the extra services it has and a higher likelihood of patients refusing transportation to a hospital from a home birth scenario.

When triaging an individual to see if they are right for midwifery care and will not "risk out," midwives run into problems with women who need more expert care but are scared of what it will bring to their birth experience. The term risking out, for example when an individual "risks out" of a midwife's care, means that the individual has certain preexisting conditions that raise the risk of problems occurring during their birth, which is called a "high-risk" birth, and they have a higher chance of needing the technological tools and the specific skill set of a doctor (National Institutes of Health 2017). These can include complications such as a patient pregnant with twins, individuals with diabetes, obesity, preeclampsia, and so on. These clients need more medical expertise because there is a higher chance of a need for an intervention if an emergency arises. Midwives have no control over women who risk out of their care or need to have hospital births after they advise them of this. These individuals may not heed the midwives' advice and seek out alternative care that could put the mother and baby in a dangerous situation.

Midwives see this issue directly because many women who fear medicalization reach out for their services first with the goal of having a less interventionist birthing experience. Some women have seen the 2008 Ricki Lake documentary *The Business of Being Born*, which details how the United States healthcare system views childbirth as a money-making opportunity set on a schedule, and this has affected their decisions when looking at their own birth. The midwives in this research have not only pointed out the problems with how the United States approaches birth that this documentary circulates to a wider audience, but also they note the difficulties that it has created in their relationships with patients. One midwife describes these obstacles well:

> When we get a like mid-pregnancy transfer for non-logistical reasons like not somebody who has moved or something, but somebody who just wants to change care provider, the number one reason they give for why they're coming to us is that they saw The Business of Being Born and are like now scared by their provider and want an out of hospital birth or, you know, midwifery care… so it's a cool movie, and they make some really good points … it's not out of nowhere but it's scared a lot of people into thinking that one intervention is going to yield the next and it's, it's difficult because on the one hand, there are people who definitely do it that way. And on the other hand, sometimes the intervention cycle, the spiral starts because like things aren't going well. (Midwife Interview 2)

Midwives want to be available for women who do not have preexisting medical conditions that would need a more hands-on birth from a physician, but some individuals may still require a physician and hospital services if complications arise. This situation puts midwives in a hard spot because if a patient needs a higher level of care but fear a different provider will lead to them having a medicalized birth, they might seek other services that may not be accredited or safe. This situation drives midwives to create techniques to build a relationship with their patients so their advice will be heeded.

The midwives I spoke with discussed different techniques they use to prepare and build trust with their patients to ease their worries and ensure that patients will listen to the midwives' recommendations. Midwives want to provide the best level of care and building trust with clients is important because midwives need their patients to respect and heed their professional advice. A midwife in this research describes a scenario where she

received some pushback from the partner of her client:

> She had not been progressing for a long time and then we recommended an epidural. Before we did the epidural, we did some things to help the positioning, you know, and then another four hours passed without her dilating at all so I was like "uhhh, it's time for some Pitocin," and her partner was like, "I don't know why we got to go straight to the drugs," and I was like "oooooooh, we did NOT go straight to the drugs, sir." (Midwife Interview 2)

This midwife received a hostile response from her patient's partner who wanted to advocate for her patient, and she had to navigate a situation where she faced an uphill battle in giving this woman interventions that she needed for her health. This fear of medicalization has affected the relationships between the provider and patient, making the job of the provider more complicated. Another midwife describes what worries her when people who need that extra care do not heed their provider's advice:

> We've had cases where we have told patients that they are not good candidates for midwifery care or birth center because they have like risked out. And you need care beyond either what [midwives] can provide or what we can provide in our [birth] center and every now and then we have one of those who goes and finds a certified professional midwife to deliver with which is just like really scary. (Midwife Interview 2)

Women who turn to certified professional midwives when they require the care that only hospitals and physicians can provide can create a negative connotation for the rest of the midwifery profession. When a client chooses to go against medical advice, and then a midwife decides to take them on, it could affect the rest of the profession due to the potential for the birth to end in disaster. People then point to all of midwifery as the culprit for the danger and this negative connotation continues to affect the way midwives are accepted into society. This issue could perpetuate the biomedical model being viewed as superior in the United States' culture because it creates the perception that different styles of birth are excessively risky (Lee et al. 2019). The midwifery model of care puts women as the decider in their birth experience, which could be interpreted by other providers as unnecessarily risky.

This fear of medicalization can result in individuals refusing routine tests that check their health and that of their baby. Midwives still use tests to check the progression of the pregnancy and make sure the mother does not have any underlying conditions that could require a physician's care. A midwife in this study describes how she wants to be able to give her clients the experience they came to her for, but this can be complicated:

> There are things they don't want you know… perfect example is always the glucose test; nobody ever wants to do it. [Lots of our patients have] read online somewhere, that is horrible for you and it has … I don't know what in it, you know, really it's sugar it's very sugary water. We have the kind that's like no additives, no preservatives like really like doesn't even have dye in it, clear. And people don't want to take it. And it's really frustrating because sometimes they walk in drinking like a soda or juice and you're like, it's the same thing. But when we talk about that one… I'm like, that's the only test and we have the evidence-base to be able to diagnose diabetes. (Midwife Interview 3)

This anxiety about having a medicalized experience can make women feel that different tests will lead them down a path of a fully medicalized birth. In some cases, the tests that midwives use may reveal that patients require a physician's care during childbirth, but these tests are necessary for a certain standard of care in pregnancy. The fact that the biomedical model depends on the analysis of different tests can continue this fear that women have toward the medicalized birth, causing them to resist the necessary level of adequate care.

Apart from testing, the discussion of transportation to a hospital from a home birth or birth center setting is a typical moment where women worry they will end up having a medicalized birth experience. While some of these transportations are responses to emergencies, midwives often suggest a

preventive move to the hospital in order to prepare for a potential emergency, bringing up possible situations to prepare the mother. The goal is to have the mother ultimately make the call based on her midwives' advice, but due to this fear of medicalization that happens in hospitals, patients may decide against going when it is a necessary next step. One midwife discusses a hard situation she was put in because of a client that was concerned about abandoning her home birth plan:

> So one of our contracts that [patients] sign with us is that, that if we think it's necessary to transfer we'll say that and we want them to support us in that but just because they signed my contract at the beginning doesn't mean we're going to necessarily follow through. And I never had to leave a client, but it crosses my mind, sometimes, and it would be desertion. Right. So, I had a situation in the summer where maybe the baby had had some questionable heart tones, and we had done a little monitoring and it was all fine and good, but I said "I'm not sure this is [the best home birth situation]…" (client replies), "No, no, we're staying home, we're staying home"… I talked with all my peers, like, what do I do if, if, I think it's time to go, and she doesn't. Where does it…Where is it desertion versus I can't care for you anymore because this is not healthy, you know, and I think my boss said, "Call an ambulance and tell the ambulance that she's theirs. And then leave." (Midwife Interview 7)

In all of these patient relationship scenarios, midwives are put into complicated situations because of their patients' fear of medicalization. These women worry that once they arrive at a hospital, they will be buried under interventions that will eventually lead to a C-section. While midwives want women to be in charge of their own experience, this anxiety surrounding medicalization can impact the ability of providers to do their job. MacDonald explains a solution to this issue when she discusses how "[a woman] makes sense of her request [for intervention] as an 'informed choice,' carefully distinguishing her experience from the interventionist routine she had previously experienced" (MacDonald 2011, 5). Women want to feel control over their birthing experience, which is why making these decisions as an informed choice that a woman can make with advice from her midwife could address this fear. This means including women in the entire birth process and making the experience more of a joint effort between the provider and the mother, rather than delegating everything to the professional. The medicalization of birth will continue to affect the relationships between provider and patient, and patients' fear of this process can cause multiple problems for providers who aim to give their patients the best care possible.

Conclusion

The medicalized birth in the U.S. has been propelled by advancements in obstetrical technologies that intend to make birth less dangerous and unpredictable, but midwives have seen a negative side to this; some women fear interventions so much so that they ignore necessary medical advice. Both the typical embodiment of medicalization, exemplified by the high rates of C-sections and inductions in the U.S., and the backlash that some patients show to this phenomenon through their fear of medicalization in turn affects their healthcare decisions, is something that midwives see consistently in their work. Michel Foucault's theory of biopower (Comaroff and Comaroff 2014) and Robbie David-Floyd's idea of the technocratic birth (1994) can help explain how or why women are making their decisions, by describing how medicalization interacts with technology and why women fear interventions leading to the hyper-medicalization of. Midwives strive to find a middle ground between using necessary technologies and obstetrical tools to assist women in birth without raising the C-section rate, all while a client has their own needs and wants for their birth experience.

While technology can have a positive impact, practitioners in birth need to be aware and cautious of their reliance on these tools in their work because this can lead to distrust from women who see this as negatively affecting their birthing experience. These issues can also affect problems with access to healthcare in the United States, specifically concerning cost and coverage, which could be discussed in further

research. Additionally, these technologies affect the culture of birth across the country by enabling the medicalization of birth. This can adversely affect the rates of unnecessary interventions for women, such as C-sections and labor inductions, making the natural experience of birth much more dangerous than it needs to be.

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Activists in Red Capes: Women's Use of *The Handmaid's Tale* to Fight for Reproductive Justice

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines women's use of the notable red and white handmaid costume from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* at political demonstrations following the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Drawing on ten in-depth ethnographic interviews with women who participated in handmaid chapters, my study finds that interviewees began to wear the handmaid costume at political protests because they increasingly saw parallels between the United States and Gilead—the totalitarian society in Atwood's novel—as a result of the 2016 election. Participants viewed the costume as a feminist symbol that enabled them to increase awareness about women's issues, particularly related to reproductive justice. Additionally, interviewees saw the anonymity of the costume as a way to represent all women, especially those who were unable to participate in such protests. This study extends existing scholarship on social movements and women's activism in the United States by exploring women's reasons for involvement in this new form of protest and their use of dystopian popular culture as the basis of their performance activism.

Keywords: handmaids; performance activism; reproductive justice; 2016 presidential election; Margaret Atwood

In the wake of the 2016 American presidential election, women's activism and political involvement surged (Kurtzleben 2018; Meyer and Tarrow 2018; Tatum and Manchester 2017). Women who participated in the January 2017 Women's March reported that they would continue engaging in activist work following the march, and 2018 saw a record number of women running for political office for the first time (Kurtzleben 2018; Spencer and Verdeja 2017). Additionally, newly formed activist groups and grassroots initiatives emerged as part of a larger anti-Trump resistance movement (Meyer and Tarrow 2018; Han and Oyakawa 2018).

Included in this global wave of resistance is a new form of protest: women who gather in public spaces and at demonstrations dressed as handmaids from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (see figure 1). These women are typically members of official handmaid chapters, found throughout the United States and in other countries, who organize around issues of women's reproductive rights and draw on the story's portrayal of a totalitarian society that oppresses women by restricting what they do with their bodies, whom they can love, and where they can live. In fact, handmaid protests have become so popular that they have been the subject of many mainstream news sources; for example, the BBC recently described the

Figure 1. Handmaids Tale at the Boston Womens March, 2019. Kai Medina (Mk170101), CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Handmaids_Tale_at_the_Boston_Womens_March_2019.jpg

costume as an "international protest symbol" (Alter 2018; Beaumont and Holpuch 2018; Bell 2018; Hauser 2017).

This paper investigates why these women have chosen to dress as handmaids as a form of political protest and the importance of the 2016 presidential election in their decision to mobilize. Because many of the activists who engage in this work are middle to upper middle class, white, middle-aged women, the current study also asks why this particular demographic group was attracted to a form of activism that relies so heavily on *The Handmaid's Tale*. In doing so, my ethnographic study builds on and extends existing scholarship on women's involvement in activism during the Trump era, performance activism as a form of political protest, the ways that activists use digital media to inform and enhance their work, and the potential for using feminist dystopia in women's political activism.

The next sections outline the theoretical framework, which draws on two bodies of literature: (1) cycles of protest and reasons for involvement and (2) performance activism. A discussion of the methodology follows. I then provide contextual information on *The Handmaid's Tale* before discussing the findings.

Cycles of Protest and Reasons for Involvement

Meyer and Tarrow (2018) consider the 2017 Women's March to be the beginning of what they term the "anti-Trump Resistance Movement" and the start of a new protest cycle. One characteristic of such a cycle is the development of new forms of protests (Tarrow 2018). For instance, scholars note that Indivisible, a national movement of grassroots activism that emerged as part of the anti-Trump resistance, used decentralized organizing tactics taken from the Tea Party, a fiscally conservative movement in the United States (Han and Oyakawa 2018; Indivisible, n.d.; Roth 2018). However, there has been less scholarly attention given to the dynamic ways that women's feminist activism has incorporated new forms of protest following the 2016 presidential election.

As new protest cycles emerge, different ways of becoming aware of and involved in activism can also develop (Gaby and Caren 2012; Jost et al. 2018; Roth 2018). For instance, the internet, and particularly Twitter and Facebook, have more recently become important ways that activists disseminate relevant and motivational information, attract potential recruits, and strengthen ties with like-minded members (Jost et al. 2018; Roth 2018). These patterns were found in the Occupy Wall Street movement, one of the first forms of protests to rely heavily on Facebook and Twitter to increase activist mobilization. In the Occupy protests, images shared on Facebook were particularly effective at gaining new activists and growing support for the movement (Gaby and Caren 2012) while Twitter hashtags and mentions were useful in message dissemination and engaging activists (Tremayne 2014). These strategies can help to establish connections with potential recruits and contribute to building activist networks via social media (Bastos, Mercea, and Charpentier 2015; Gibson and McAllister 2013). However, as previous scholars have argued, virtual ties alone do not replace the importance of in-person social ties for facilitating activist mobilization (Bastos, Mercea, and Charpentier 2015; Gibson and McAllister 2013).

Other factors also influence people's decision to participate in activism. For instance, a person is more likely to begin engaging in collective action when they see a potential for social impact, including the opportunity to influence policy change (Jasper 2011), the likelihood of building effective opposition (Hornsey et al. 2006), and the ability to impact the perceived views of the general public (Hornsey et al. 2006). In addition, emotions such as fear, moral shock, and anger can contribute to people's initial foray into activism (Beyerlein and Ryan 2018; Gould 2009; Jasper 2011; Kleres and Wettergren 2017). Although there is a growing amount of research on the role of emotions and activism more generally, there is little scholarly work to date on the ways that emotions may have motivated women to mobilize their political activist efforts in the wake of the 2016 presidential election.

Performance Activism

In addition to the heightened role of social media and strong emotional responses to the 2016 presidential election in mobilizing individuals for collective action, performance emerged as a key component for handmaid activists. Drawing on fields such as anthropology, sociology, and performance studies, performance activism can be defined as

> a particular kind of performance striving simultaneously to attract and hold attention and challenging the understandings and expectations of fellow protesters and the general public while, paradoxically, staying within the boundaries of these commonly held understandings and expectations [maximizing attention without alienating neutral observers]. (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2007, 91)

In other words, performance activism can include dramatic or ritualized performances, songs, poetry, and visual artwork that are intended as political actions, often to critique perceived inequities and injustices (Gould 2009; Heuvel 199l; Tate Modern 2020). Through these media, activists seek to disseminate their messages, encourage audience engagement, and educate others (Morandi 2020).

Activism in the United States has a notable history of performance, including groups such as ACT UP—an activist group formed in the 1980s to combat the AIDS epidemic and the dearth of adequate governmental response to the crisis—and various anti-war efforts (Gould 2009; Heuvel 1991; Kistenberg 1995; Kutz-Flamenbaum 2007; Meyer 2007; Wiegmink 2006). Humor, hyperbole, and staying in character are just a few strategies by which performance activism can challenge normative assumptions and communicate messages. For example, some of ACT UP's street performances incorporated jokes and targeted individuals through satire, while other demonstrations took on more grim or somber tones (Gould 2009). In addition, performance activism can incorporate aspects that are norm-embracing, norm-challenging, or both to disrupt normative ideas. For example, Raging Grannies, an anti-war group, has exhibited these strategies by playing on ageist and sexist assumptions about grandmothers (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2017). They practice norm-embracing strategies with old-fashioned clothing and their performance skits, while anger and sarcasm in their songs challenge norms (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2017).

Other performance activism strategies include performance structure. For example, some of Code Pink's informal, non-structured performance protests were more effective at encouraging audience participation than structured performances because of minimal wardrobe requirements and relatively accessible actions in which audience members were encouraged to participate. Structured performance practices that draw a more distinct boundary between audience and protester, like Missile Dick Chicks' character roles and detailed costumes that members make themselves, may have more potential in drawing attention to the specific messages or advocacy of the group, which are not always favorably received (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2007).

Moreover, recent forms of performance activism have gained global attention because of their association with particular symbols. For example, the Guy Fawkes mask, associated with the Occupy Wall Street movement, has become an international political icon and a symbol representing political dissent that continues to resonate beyond the movement (Kohns 2013). More recently, the pussyhat, popularized at the 2017 Women's March, was designed for aerial shots and cameras and continues to be associated with the women's movement (Larabee 2017). Despite marked differences between the Guy Fawkes mask and the pussyhat, these symbols share some combination of prolific media visibility and international use, which can contribute to effective political mobilization and recruiting new members (Gaby and Caren 2012).

The handmaid costume is another significant and recent example of the use of symbols in performance activism. Women have dressed as handmaids at state capitol buildings, the Supreme Court, and other public spaces across the globe to protest crisis pregnancy clinics, Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation, and other threats to women's reproductive rights, yet little scholarly research attends to this emerging

protest strategy. This study addresses this gap by identifying reasons that some women have chosen to be involved in their respective handmaid chapters and their reflections on why they believe their performance activism is effective. Such a focus is particularly important given that women make up the majority of those involved in this activism, which uses potent symbols from dystopic popular fiction to draw attention to and resist dangerous policies exacerbated during the Trump Administration.

Methodology: Interviewing Handmaid Activists

This study relies on an analysis of ten semi-structured, in-depth ethnographic interviews that I conducted between April and October 2018 (see table 1). For recruitment, I used convenience sampling and snowballing methods, specifically reaching out to various handmaid chapters' Facebook groups and posting my recruitment statement on those pages. Interviews ranged from thirty-nine minutes to one hour and thirty-six minutes, for an average of an hour and five minutes. All interviews were conducted in person or over the phone, and all identifying information was anonymized in the transcripts, including the names of interviewees' respective handmaid chapters. As part of the ethnographic interview, participants were asked questions about their upbringing, responses to the 2016 presidential election, involvement in handmaid activist groups, and their activist work more generally. Respondents were offered a copy of the transcript as compensation for their time and participation.

All interviewees are white women and ranged in age from 28 to 66 with an average age of 47. The vast majority of participants are middle class and highly educated; most have a college degree and all have at least some college experience. Most respondents currently reside in the Southern United States, but two live in California and another resides in Maryland. Because the issues that chapters

Table 1: Respondent Demographics

Respondent	Handmaid Group	Level of Education	Social Class	Marital Status	Age	Race
Jane	California	Bachelor's	Upper Class	Married	40s	White
Sarah	Texas	Master's	Middle Class	Married	40s	White
SusieQ	Texas	Bachelor's	Upper Middle Class	Single	40s	White
Helga	Texas	Some College	Middle Class	Married	60s	White
SandeE	Texas	Bachelor's	Middle Class	Married	50s	White
Carrie	California	Bachelor's	Middle Class	Single	20s	White
Kristin	Texas	Post-Master's	Middle/Upper Middle Class	Married	40s	White
Mary	Alabama	Some College	Working Class	Married	40s	White
Noelle	Texas	Master's	Middle/Upper Middle Class	Married	40s	White
Nicole	Maryland area	Bachelor's	Middle/Upper Middle Class	Partnered	50s	white

choose to organize around are influenced by the specific contexts of participants' lived environments, the regional diversity of my sample illuminates women's engagement in this type of performance activism across geographical contexts in the United States.

I relied on ethnographic interviews because they allow for a detailed and nuanced understanding of people's experiences and perceptions (Weiss 1995). Six interviews were conducted in person and the rest were done via phone. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the author. After analyzing each interview transcript multiple times, I identified two major themes: (1) a new cycle of protest and reasons for involvement and (2) performance activism. I coded the data with a trained undergraduate student coding partner; we had high intercoder reliability and when discrepancies in coding arose, we discussed them until we reached an agreement on the appropriate coding of the excerpts. I then selected representative interview excerpts to use in this paper as illustrations of the themes.

Overall, my positionality as a woman of color in my early twenties and self-identified feminist allowed me to cultivate trust and openness with respondents, as many had expressed a desire to engage younger women and women of color in their activist work. Also, my gender, race, and feminist positionality guided my interest in this topic and informed my analysis of the data. Below, I provide contextual information on *The Handmaid's Tale* before explaining my research findings.

The Handmaid's Tale and Handmaid Groups

Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* takes place in the fictitious country of Gilead at an unspecified time, a setting where fundamentalists and patriarchal governmental officials control every aspect of women's lives, including their reproductive choices. Some women are designated as handmaids who exist as surrogates for mothers who could not have children of their own in order to provide the country's male leaders and their wives with children. The novel is featured within the ranks of other classic dystopian literature, a genre that pulls on contemporary elements of society and casts an interplay of past, present, and imagined future to critique society and raise awareness around an issue. Following the election, many people began to identify frightening parallels between *The Handmaid's Tale* and the United States (Armstrong 2018; Morrison 2017).

Atwood's story has also been popularized by Hulu's widely successful adaptation of the novel, which began airing shortly after the election and has helped bring this twentieth century literature to a twenty-first century audience. Its modernized rendition resonates with today's political and cultural landscape as evidenced by parallels made between the story and the United States' current political climate concerning governmental efforts to restrict women's reproductive rights (Armstrong 2018; Morrison 2017). Another significant indicator of the story's resonance is the fascinating trend of women donning the handmaid costumes at various types of local, state, national, and international political protests (Beaumont and Holpuch 2018; Bell 2018; Bradley 2018; Hauser 2017).

Handmaid groups began emerging in the United States in January 2017. There is a substantial number of handmaid groups throughout the United States, and each U.S. state and the District of Columbia have participating chapters in the Handmaid Coalition (Handmaid Coalition, n.d.). Additionally, Argentina, Ireland, and England are just a few countries in which women have participated in handmaid protests (Bell 2018). Although each group maintains a level of autonomy, all are engaged in advancing reproductive rights and organizing around other social justice causes. In the United States, these include removing the statute of limitations for sexual violence, raising awareness of disproportionately higher maternal mortality rates among Black/African American women, abolishing Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and protesting Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation.

"It was a moment of power:" Mobilizing Handmaid Groups for Performance Activism after 2016

I organize my findings by first discussing the motivations that catalyzed interviewees' activist mobilization and involvement in handmaid chapters following the 2016 presidential election, attending to the role of performance, social media, the striking imagery of the Hulu series, and perceived parallels between Gilead and the United States. In the section that follows, I explore participants' performance activism and strategies with a focus on imagery in their performance as handmaids and the strategies used to craft messages across audiences and continuously assert the handmaid figure's political significance.

A New Cycle of Protest and Reasons for Involvement

On November 9th, 2016, women across the United States awoke to the news that Donald Trump had won the presidential election. All ten respondents report having a visceral, negative reaction to the results. As Carrie, from California, explains: "Physically I was sick. I spent that whole morning throwing up. It was really emotional. And it wasn't just Trump. It was looking at so many other potential victories that we could have had and just seeing how that wasn't there. We're totally still in that." Carrie's response, like that of other interviewees, is notable given the role of emotions in activist mobilization and the political process at large (Jasper 2011) and speaks to the magnitude of fear and anxiety regarding women's rights in the United States following the presidential election. Additional reactions include those of Mary, from Alabama, who reports feeling "heartbroken…and utter disgust with my fellow human beings," and Noelle, in Texas, who "shut down for a few days." These comments illustrate the powerful emotional response that these women had to the election of Donald Trump. Their fear and anxiety, in turn, motivated them to reach out to local handmaid chapters and facilitated their involvement.

Contributing to their decision to join handmaid chapters, interviewees explained that one particularly powerful source of connection to the handmaids' imagery came from Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* series. In fact, eight women reported watching the series regularly. As explored in this subsection, viewers are presented with powerful visuals, narratives, characters, and storylines that dovetail with current political issues and may be more powerful and memorable than simply seeing text-based posts on Facebook or Twitter.

For five women, their participation in handmaid chapters was either their first activist involvement ever or the first time they had been engaged in political activism since their college years. SusieQ, from Texas, explains, "It [the election] woke me up again. I was on fire. I just thought, 'Oh my god I've been asleep at the wheel. Not that I could have personally changed anything for the last twenty years, but I was absolutely emboldened again…I thought, 'I'm not gonna go out like this. I'm gonna go down fighting, and I have to get involved.'" SusieQ's comments highlight the connection between her reaction to the election and her intention to be involved. She is among three other interviewees who had not been active in social justice work since their college years. The results of the 2016 presidential election, then, proved to be a pivotal moment in these women's mobilization.

For the five other women, the 2016 presidential election altered their ongoing activist work. For example, Mary, an environmental activist in Alabama, says that the election, "inspired me to be more involved and you know fighting more on the social justice side and getting away from the environmental a little bit." Carrie, another prominent activist prior to the election in California, adds that her work "deepened in intensity." Both Carrie and another interviewee, Nicole, report having careers in creative, non-violent organizing, which helps to explain why not all participants began their activism as a result of the 2016 presidential election. Still, the election profoundly shaped their activism and heightened their interest in feminist activism in particular.

Notably, the women attributed their interest in becoming involved in feminist activism after Trump's election in part to a sense of

differential privilege that they have as middle class white women. For example, Sarah, from Texas, reports, "We have a lot to fucking answer for…After the election, liberal white feminists like me got shook real hard because even though I'm not somebody with a lot of power or status, I am. I am a homeowner. I have a job. I have a Master's degree. My husband has those things too. We're raising our child in comfort." For many of these women, Trump's presidency was shocking and completely unexpected—an emotional response that prompted them to recognize their relative privilege. Such realizations led to a strong feeling of responsibility to engage in activism that they felt others, including some women of color and economically marginalized women, may not be able to participate in because of their differential access to time and other valuable resources.

Performance as handmaids was seen as an ideal way to use their privilege to engage in feminist activism and represent other, more vulnerable and marginalized women. As Helga, from Texas, explains, "I like to tell these women [who want to participate in activism but feel that they cannot] that they do participate, they are the ones in character with their heads down. I let them know it's okay to tell others that it's them under the cape. I represent all the women that want to be under the cape. That's very important to me." Helga's description of her performance activism as a handmaid suggests that participants view the costume, aided by the level of anonymity that it affords, as a collective symbol that represents all women whether they are actually dressed as a handmaid or not. This perception allows Helga and others to feel a part of something greater than themselves while simultaneously creating a space for other women who are unable to participate to imagine themselves there, too. In being able to engage in this type of feminist performance activism and represent other women, protesters perhaps re-inscribe their own sense of agency and add to their perceived impact, a component that clarifies the appeal of the handmaid costume and chapters (Hornsey et al. 2006).

Other reasons participants attributed their involvement in handmaid chapters to are social media, the striking imagery of the show, and perceived parallels between Gilead and the U.S. Prior studies indicate that most people join social movements because of the power of social ties (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). However, as studies on the Occupy Movement indicate (Gaby and Caren 2012; Tremayne 2014), social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are becoming more important in activist protests. For the participants in my study, six became involved as a result of reading posts on social media platforms and seeing news coverage about the handmaid protests. As Helga, from Texas, explains, "It was during Austin's annual SXSW festival. I saw some women on TV dressed as handmaids promoting the Hulu series. I thought, oh how I'd love to be a part of that. Soon after I heard about the NARAL [National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws] handmaid group and I actively pursued the group." Like Helga, other interviewees also revealed that the strong imagery of the protest groups on social media and the news prompted their decision to become involved (Gaby and Caren 2012).

One narrative from the series that participants reported particularly resonating with them following the 2016 presidential election is the extent to which male leaders in Gilead attempt to control women's freedoms and reproductive rights. They connect this narrative with what they see going on in the current political situation in the United States. SanDeE, from Texas, says, "I could see that [Gilead] was a potential outcome of everything that I've watched happen since I became aware of it [extremism]…I watched the rise of religious extremism and anti-abortion extremism in America, and the handmaids seemed like a logical conclusion." Recognizing the frightening parallels between Gilead and the perceived extremism in America today motivated SanDeE and others to become involved in a handmaid chapter as a form of protest. These groups also provided a unique way for the participants to engage in performance activism.

Performing The Handmaid's Tale

Performance activism includes dramatic or ritualized performances, visual artwork, and other artistic mediums intended to critique perceived inequities and injustices. I argue that

the handmaid chapters in my study are a contemporary example of such activism; the women dress in the eye-catching handmaid costume, recreate the way characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* walk in two-by-two processionals, and coordinate their movements and behaviors with other handmaids in public settings. By performing elements of the story through these synchronized movements and the striking costume, interviewees achieve an attention-grabbing image that casts a comparison between Gilead and the United States to demonstrate their similarities. Chapters have used the handmaid costume and exhibited this performance in public spaces to oppose Roy Moore's candidacy in the 2018 Alabama senate race and Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court, to protest crisis pregnancy clinics, and to advocate for the removal of the statute of limitations for sexual assault and rape allegations in California. As explored below, I have categorized their performance activism strategies into two subthemes: imagery and crafting their message.

Imagery

Imagery is not only effective in attracting the women to participate in handmaid activism, but it also plays a meaningful part in their continued involvement. Drawing on the series and book, protesters wear ankle-length, red capes and white bonnets and often walk in pairs with their heads slightly bowed (see figure 2). Once settled in a location, they regularly choose to hold signs related to the political issue at hand, such as "abortion is normal" and "No Moore." Because the handmaid costume is so central to the story and has become a recognizable protest symbol, protesters are very intentional and deliberate about cultivating this image and using signs to clarify the purpose and message of each protest.

As many members of the California chapter work in media production, they rely on their professional skills and experience to stage and photograph protests designed for optimal camera exposure. Jane, from California, explains this process: "We produced it like a film, like what imagery do we want to see, what does the script look like, who are we casting in the red cloaks, what cameras do we want. We were very deliberate; we used our career experience to plan it." Jane's quote exemplifies the level of intentionality that went into producing short videos of the handmaid activists for social media purposes. Although video production was unique to the chapter in California, respondents in other states reported choreographing their entrances and having agreed upon behaviors for each demonstration. For instance, Sarah describes the choreography that went into protesting Senate Bill 8 at the Texas Capitol, a bill which bans fetal tissue donation, restricts late-term abortions, and requires fetal tissue to be cremated or buried: "On Monday, we decided we would have an action about it [SB8] and so she had us into two columns, and of course, the gallery is a square. She had us enter the doors, split off, go around, meet, pass each other, come back, and exit the gallery." Her description highlights the attention to detail that goes into coordinating protests. The formation into two columns, which mirrors the handmaid processions in the story, also demonstrates how members actively incorporate such characteristics into their protests.

Like the pussyhat, another protest symbol that emerged following the election, the handmaid costume is designed to be recognizable and a visually rich symbol for photographic purposes (Larabee 2017). The costume's vivid colors and departure from everyday clothing styles combined with choreographed movements make for an eye-catching image that has the ability to allude to a dystopian future. Both symbols rely on digital media for visibility and messaging purposes and support past research that predicts the greater use of digital media in social movements (Karpf 2018).

Crafting their message

Participants explained that they employ a variety of strategies to help ensure that their intended messages are being accurately conveyed to bystanders and journalists. These tactics include the costume, silence and chanting, use of protest signs, and designating a spokesperson. By far, the most crucial part of this performance is the costume. Sarah recalls this experience at the Texas Capitol:

Figure 2. A Handmaid's Tale protest in Santa Fe, Argentina, to campaign for safe, legal, and free abortion. TitiNicola, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Intervencion_The_Handmaid%27s_Tale_mala_junta_santa_fe_por_el_aborto_seguro_legal_y_gratuito_en_Argentina_09.jpg

> We're walking at a brisk pace, well the capes, it's four yards of fabric. It billows out and you get bigger as you walk, and it's like grazing all these guys' shoulders as we go by…It poofs up like it's so cinematic you feel like such a badass…And it's enveloping these people who have ostensibly far greater power than I do as a lowly school teacher and definitely more wealth…But in that moment, you could just feel everybody go kinda still. It was a moment of power 'cause you don't think of getting those people's attention…It charges up the room.

Sarah's description of protesting Senate Bill 8 highlights the joint role of choreography and costume in these demonstrations and how they contribute to feelings of empowerment for participants. Other participants share Sarah's perspective. They reported that being in costume together in a political space is an especially politically empowering experience for them as women.

Similarly, women talk about the power of the costume to connect individual women together as members of a political community. Carrie, from California, says, "There's a sense of strength that comes from being there, not having to be there as yourself, but being there is literally a message that speaks beyond you as an individual and to a larger sense of camaraderie around something that's happening. The costume is like putting on a community in itself. It's taking on so much more than yourself." Carrie's comments indicate that the large bonnet and loose fabric of the gowns protect the activists' identities while both

enabling the women to speak to something far greater than themselves and providing a sense of collective feminist identity.

Secondly, as part of this performance, protesters are often silent, which draws on the subservient nature of the handmaid character. This strategy also inhibits escalation with bystanders and affirms their non-violent stature, which helps prevent negative news coverage (Andrews and Caren 2010; Kistenberg 1995; Meyer 2007). As Kristin, from Texas, explains, "A lot of the silence is supposed to be reflecting the position that the handmaids in the show and the book have been put in, where they're being silenced… what it's supposed to be representing is that this is not a place… where we as America should be." Silence helps to further cast a symbolic parallel between Gilead and the United States—a parallel that creates a visceral experience for those protesting and one that protesters also hope to convey to bystanders.

Participants realize that their performance may not always effectively communicate their messages, especially if bystanders are unaware of the premise of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Therefore, some groups have, at times, incorporated the use of chants and signs while protesting. When asked about the reasons for chanting to protest Roy Moore's candidacy and Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation, Mary and Nicole explain that it had more to do with their position on the side of the road near traffic, making it a more practical decision. Mary adds that it was dark outside when they protested and therefore the costume was not as visible. Such decisions are significant because they highlight the intentionality of the handmaid performance and how respondents adapt to the specific context of their protest environment.

Protesters also regularly hold signs to ensure that their messaging is clear, which makes it less likely to be misconstrued by members of the media, the public, and bystanders. Signs specifically draw attention to the issue at hand without protesters having to engage directly with onlookers (see figure 3).

Handmaid chapters also typically designate a spokesperson who is not in costume and often already has a public identity to provide information and answer questions from journalists and bystanders. As SanDeE, from Texas, explains, "The handmaids show up and get press. The press love to stand there and take photos. The press wants to interview them…you have people like Sarah who answer questions." The spokesperson role gives reporters and bystanders a central figure to talk to who is well versed on the issues at hand and able to speak articulately on the matter. This role prevents those who are less informed on the issue from communicating the wrong message, helps protect the identities of those who do not wish to be public, and ensures that their message is being portrayed accurately. All of these protest decisions, including costumes, silence/chants, protest signs, and the use of a spokesperson during each protest suggest that handmaid protestors are particularly deliberate and thoughtful about the multiple dimensions of their group's protest performance and interactions with bystanders (Beaumont and Holpuch 2018; Bell 2018; Hauser 2017).

Despite similarities between the handmaid chapters and previous performance activist groups like ACT UP and Code Pink, the handmaids are distinctive because they are based on a culturally popular dystopian narrative. The handmaid costume as a protest symbol represents opportunities and challenges inherent in its allusions to popular culture and current political issues. Because of the costume's widespread recognition and place in popular culture, handmaid chapters appear to be better positioned than previous activist groups to reach greater and more varied audiences, a characteristic which may be particularly apt for recruiting new members (Gaby and Caren 2012). For instance, stories about handmaid protests have been tagged under "entertainment" as well as "news" sections, and they have been featured in online newspapers such as the Washington Post as well as popular press magazines like Vanity Fair (Bradley 2018; Joplin, Jewell, and Martin 2018).

However, it is the costume's very popularity and ability to blur the distinctiveness of "news" and "entertainment" that also contributes to one of its greatest challenges as a protest symbol. Regardless of the handmaid activists'

Figure 3. Illinois Handmaids Stop Brett Kavanaugh Rally, Downtown Chicago, Illinois, August 26, 2018. Charles Edward Miller from Chicago, United States, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Illinois_Handmaids_Stop_Brett_Kavanaugh_Rally_Downtown_Chicago_Illinois_8-26-18_3437_(42505508810).jpg

intentionality of their political symbols and performances, in the months leading up to Halloween in 2018, companies advertised the handmaid costume for the occasion (Vaglanos 2018; Wanshel 2018). Such advertisements are significant not only because they co-opt and depoliticize the costume and activist efforts of handmaid chapters, but also because they seem to undermine the feminist messages that handmaid chapters champion. Therefore, although popularity as a Halloween costume may lead to increased potential for the handmaid costume to receive greater recognition and receptivity as a political and popular culture icon, its leisurely or comedic use for a holiday like Halloween also poses risks to the costume's effectiveness as a protest symbol.

The above strategies serve as important ways in which these activists continue to assert the political meanings of the handmaid costume. By engaging in performance activism that draws on a storyline in popular culture, participants may potentially compete with media sources that elevate the entertainment aspects of *The Handmaid's* Tale and unwittingly or intentionally divert attention from the political relevance of the handmaid costume and dilute its significance. However, through the costume, choreography, and other political strategies, handmaid activists define and articulate the feminist connections between Atwood's story and the present political context. In doing so, handmaid activists continue to call for awareness and action

around women's freedom and reproductive rights.

Conclusion: From Fiction to Organizing a Feminist Future

This study examines women's use of the handmaid costume from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* for political protests and their reasons for doing so. Findings reveal that the 2016 presidential election was a pivotal moment for women, particularly middle to upper middle class, middle-aged, white women, to become involved in handmaid chapters. Women were drawn to these groups because of their knowledge of the storyline, their fear of a Trump presidency and what it meant for women's freedoms and reproductive rights, and news stories about women dressing as handmaids as a form of political protest. It was this combination that compelled them to find a handmaid chapter in their area often via social media.

Once involved in a handmaid group, participants choreographed their movements in various public spaces based on Atwood's dystopian storyline to draw attention to the perceived parallels between Gilead and the United States. In recreating the ritualistic processions and embodying the story's characters for protest, women also employed different strategies—like silence, chanting, and use of signs—to maximize the effectiveness of their messaging and to resist threats to women's reproductive rights.

Handmaids are different from other performance protest groups because of their creative and effective use of a popular culture reference to make broader political statements. My research shows some of the ways that *The Handmaid's Tale* as a figure in popular culture informs these protests groups and also how activists maximize this landscape by appropriating the costume and elements of the story. By occupying political news and entertainment spaces, interviewees may achieve greater exposure but must also continuously engage protest strategies—including the costume and use of signs—to assert the handmaid figure's political significance. In doing so, they are able to raise awareness about a number of issues focused on women's rights, including crisis pregnancy clinics, the statute of limitations for rape and sexual assault, and other issues that have been exacerbated within the context of Trump's presidency.

For these women, the book and Hulu series reflect and visualize their concerns about political issues in the United States today. The vivid handmaid image, coupled with activists' personal resonance with the storyline, enables them to be active in their own storytelling and be a part of something greater than themselves. Additionally, the costume's anonymizing effect allows participants to feel as though they are representing more marginalized or vulnerable women who may not have the same resources or opportunities to participate. In projecting the possibilities of a dystopian future, activists increase the story's relevance to those outside of academic circles, which allows for greater receptivity, identification with the narrative, and perceptions of empowerment—testifying to the role fiction can play in mobilizing individuals for collective action.

One limitation of my study is that I did not interview economically marginalized women or women of color to see if they feel represented by the handmaid activists as my participants intend, which offers a fruitful avenue for future research. Nevertheless, the election informed activists' sense of responsibility to advocate on others' behalf due to their privilege. Despite limitations, this study's findings are significant because they provide important insights into the ways that some women have been motivated to mobilize during the post-2016 presidential election era to engage in a unique and powerful form of feminist performance activism. Furthermore, it is important that we understand how women are actively navigating and resisting misogynistic policies and attitudes. With the rise of women-centered dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale*'s continued resonance almost thirty-five years after its inception and its use by women for political activism speaks to broader shifts in the way that women are defining and acting politically on their identities as feminists, activists, and agents of their own stories.

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The New Normal in Urban Pakistan: A Journey of Undergraduate Students Through Photovoice

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 global health crisis is an issue of survival for individuals and communities worldwide. With its widespread consequences manifested at every level of the society, concerns about how to adapt to the new normal are rising. This study explores the lived experiences of second-year undergraduate university students located in urban Pakistan amid the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, in March to May 2020. Drawing on a participatory research approach, students as participants adopted a photovoice methodology to document, share, and analyze their new life realities. The themes that emerged from the data include fear, anxiety, isolation, relationships and hope, among others. Feelings of agency, empathy and a desire for community action were observed in the photo narratives shared by the participants, as they discussed their health, academic, and communication challenges while struggling to conform to the present circumstances.

Keywords: students; COVID-19; urban Pakistan; participatory research; photovoice

On January 22nd, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued a statement saying that there is evidence of human transmission of a viral disease with further investigation required to measure its extent. The same month, the WHO Director-General had declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHAIC). The pandemic has overwhelmed health-services around the globe, with the number of patients requiring critical care surging with every passing day (O'Reilly et al. 2020, 1). However, the virus has not only severely impacted its hosts but also the lives of every person surviving the outbreak. The world has come to the brink of a historically unprecedented halt and has seen and captured moments which may serve as a defining representation of this pandemic. Images of empty shelves in the grocery stores and long queues outside supermarkets have been the usual sight even before the imposition of lockdown in many countries. Although the production levels and stocks for staple food are at an all-time high, the issue of hunger is looming over millions of households globally, due to businesses shutting down, mass layoffs, and disruptions in domestic supply chains (Voegele 2020). Furthermore, increased media reporting and an escalating number of deaths coupled with curfews and lockdowns have led to increased psychological problems including anxiety, stress, and depression (Lima et al. 2020, 1-2).

With the many marks that the pandemic has left on every walk of human life, the education sector has also been affected globally (Burgess and Sievertsen 2020). During the closure of schools and universities in many parts of the world, curriculums have been altered to adapt to online channels for distance learning. However, this shift has raised many concerns regarding the inaccessibility of modern technology to many students if not all, thus seriously damaging the basic uniformity in their educational experience (LeBlanc 2020).

On February 26th, the government of Pakistan confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Karachi. Soon the schools, followed by colleges and universities, were shut down in the province of Sindh, where our university is located; this was an instant decision taken by the provincial government to contain the virus. The initial announcement was for a closure of two weeks, however, it kept on extending as the number of cases and the death toll increased. With the lockdown imposed in most parts of the country and the university curriculums shifted online, students were expected to adapt to the new normal.

The online transition from traditional in-person classes to online classes has not been smooth in Pakistan and is particularly affecting students from remote and low-income areas (Ali 2020). These challenges vary from lack of acceptance of online learning, to a general suspicion amongst elders regarding the usage of gadgets, to a shortage of individual study spaces. This list is not inclusive of the technical challenges faced by the students such as connectivity and bandwidth issues; only one-third of the Pakistani population had a broadband subscription by the end of 2019 (Rehman 2020). The number for 3G/4G subscription was similar. Ali (2020) reports a story of a Baloch student who began an online campaign raising awareness about the digital divide in Pakistan and demanding that online classes halt and students be given a semester break. However, a positive outcome of COVID-19 is that it is pushing the Pakistani educational ministry to repair and revamp their system (Siddiqi 2020).

Our study aimed to document the ways in which university students were acclimatizing to the conditions they had never faced before. Photovoice, as one method of participatory action research (PAR), has been widely used to better understand realities at local and community levels. It involves research participants taking photographs which are combined with their individual stories in

response to a research question. The group then discusses the pictures, what they present, and how they answer the concerned question through an individual perspective. Lastly, a final selection of the photographs based on the messages and insights the group wishes to project exhibits the answer of the participants collectively. Thus, photovoice is not an individual's story, rather it is a group's message.

This study uses photovoice to examine the life online of undergraduate university students in urban Pakistan. It presents the challenges, coping mechanisms, personal sentiments, and reactions to the drastic changes in student and social life due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. In doing so it explores the lived experiences of undergraduate students amid an uncommon global crisis, specifically focusing on the regional, social, educational, and familial context of the participants involved.

The article presents a review of the literature on the method used for this study, the impact of the pandemic on students, and their experience with online learning. It then discusses PAR as the chosen methodology and its significance to the participants, followed by a thematic analysis of the primary data. It concludes with the study findings, identifying potential avenues for future research and highlighting the pedagogical value of the study and its policy implications.

Photovoice as a participatory method

The photovoice method, is a participatory process through which individuals are entrusted with camera to create visual images that may reflect, enhance, and represent their environments. The goal of such a method is to center the individual's own experience, and to build critical dialogue around it (Wang and Burris 1997, 369). Thus, we were exploring what it means to live through a lockdown in terms of emotive, photographic evidence. To gauge the effectiveness of this method, we reviewed research-based studies that adopted photovoice to gather data and interpret evidence. The review also includes controlled and mixed methods studies assessing the impact of online learning on students' stress levels, but our focus is on the lived experience of individuals and how it shapes their realities.

One such study conducted by Tedrick Parikh and Wachter Morris (2011, 2) showed that students cope more agreeably with a crisis when they have outlets of intervention at hand. Similarly, according to a study by Dattilio and Freeman (2007, 3) students' responses to crises depend on the meaning they place upon the situation. Thus, with this, we reinforce our thesis and the idea that personal reflection through documentation i.e., a method such as the photovoice, allows students to subsist through hardship more effectively.

In another study, Shortt, Rhynas, and Holloway (2017, 7) used a photovoice methodology to understand the experience and perceptions of the role of the environment in recovery from alcohol dependence. The participatory research approach helped to capture the perspective of the participants with as few errors as possible in the contextual analysis of the data while reshuffling the traditional researcher-participant power relation. This study further lends credence to the photovoice methodology, asserting that such a method allows groups, especially vulnerable groups, to become stakeholders in their narrative.

A study conducted in Beirut, Lebanon by Strack, Magill, and McDonagh (2004, 8) used photovoice as a PAR method to promote health awareness amongst youth. The study aimed to adopt this method specifically to adolescents, to test its effectiveness, and to replicate it for further studies. The study concludes that the photovoice method encourages empowerment amongst the participants. It also signified that this process allowed youth a better understanding of their environment and a desire to engage in community work. Similarly, another study using photovoice in Los Angeles, California, concluded that photovoice projects help youth identify and engage with elements that may be causing emotional disarray that they previously could not place before documentation (Necheles et al. 2007, 9). However, despite the array of positive feedback concerning this method, it does have limitations. According to Strack, Magill, and McDonagh (2004, 9), projects like this must be

tailored specifically to its participants. It requires vigorous site selection, curriculum planning, and participant recruitment. Similarly, another such study asserts that such methods can be time-consuming, costly, and laden with ethical concerns of consent and risk for participants. Thus, when applying this methodology, it is essential to adapt to these challenges.

The impact of COVID-19 on students

There is limited literature available on the current crisis, particularly investigating its impacts on the lives of the population. Pan (2020, 2) studied the family life of students in Xiamen city, China amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The data gathered from online surveys showed an increase in time spent by the students watching television, reading books, and playing video games. Around 15 percent of the participants started to care more for their personal hygiene due to time availability. Overall, the paper presented basic statistical data collected from an unrepresentative sample drawing little evidence-based analysis. The pandemic also reflects social inequalities present in our society. Franco (2020, par. 6) highlights the lower allocation of resources to study 'social inequalities by neighborhood and urban health' compared to the other fields of concern. This has resulted in poor housing quality, making it difficult for the citizens to survive in crises such as the current pandemic where one is strictly confined to their living spaces.

A global pandemic is naturally coupled with psychological problems such as stress, anxiety, and post-traumatic disorders. These complications can be due to the existence of general uncertainty, loss of jobs, and decreased income. However, students may suffer from similar complications because of a sudden and massive shift to their learning experience, which in some cases has manifested in a complete educational pause or moving online in others. Jung, Kudo, and Choi (2012, 2) in a study conducted in Japan, sampling 226 students taking English-based online courses, identified four factors influencing stress: self-efficacy, instructional design, technology use, and collaborative process. The study reveals that a limited understanding of using information and communication technology as an interactive educational medium alone may result in "negative attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors" (Choi 2012, 2). Lazarevic and Bentz (2020, 10-11) conducted a study that aimed to find out whether there was a difference in the stress levels when students were given instructions in the traditional face-to-face way and an online setting. The data collected from the web-based survey represented differed stress levels between the two groups: online and traditional face-to-face learning. Interestingly, the stress levels were significantly lower in the students who were learning in an online-based setting as opposed to traditional. However, none of the studies took into account factors such as the effects of reduced in-person interactions of the participants with their friends or classmates and confinement to their homes. Dana Goldstein, Adam Popescu, and Nikole Hannah-Jones (2020, par. 19-20) outline the difficulties faced by educators in the rural United States due to lower class participation and raising absenteeism as the school curriculums shifted online during this crisis. The emerging reasons behind this are rooted in limited adult supervision, uneven levels of technology, and broader economic and health effects of the outbreak.

Since this pandemic is a recent global occurrence, we observe a significant gap in the existing literature on how it has affected the lives of those surviving it, particularly students. The studies based on the coronavirus outbreak, so far, revolve around its medical aspects and not its social implications. Any crisis triggers an emotional, physiological, cognitive, and behavioral response (Bergh 2009, 5) and our study aim to document these responses in the current situation through photovoice. This research helps in building literature on the social impact of the pandemic, since there are only a handful, small scale studies covering the pandemic's impact on a community level.

Methods

Participatory Action Research, or PAR, is a strand of critical action research in which the participants of a study are assigned the roles of

co-researchers (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008). Although the co-researchers are mostly drawn from marginalized groups, the case is not inherently consistent throughout. In traditional research, participants are seen as objects (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008) while PAR adopts a social justice orientation giving them a real voice by recognizing their agency. This methodology is of particular importance when it comes to students in Pakistan. Student unions have been banned since 1984 across the country and the authorities do not recognize student rights, thus students as a group have been effectively disempowered for more than three decades. This marginalization of students has further led to an existential crisis of political leadership in Pakistan (Rashid 2019). The study thus uses a PAR method, photovoice, at least partly in order to highlight research as a source of advocacy for students and other alienated groups while emphasizing participation and dialogue.

Photovoice is a method that enables to document the lives of the participants in the form of visual representation as they conceptualize their reality. It is theoretically grounded in Paulo Freire's *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) as he approaches education for critical consciousness, maintaining that visualization is a significant tool of reflection on one's community (Ronzi et al. 2016, 3) and highlights the need to take action against the repressive elements. PAR methods such as the one employed in this study are widely used in public health and educational research. Their reliance on participants' knowledge to better understand the issues makes them unique among other qualitative approaches.

The study was conducted as part of an undergraduate course, an introduction to qualitative research in which the students used the photovoice method in an assignment posted during the second week of off-campus learning. Each student was instructed to capture multiple photographs representing different themes of their online educational and social experience and their life amidst the pandemic. All used their own cameras to capture the photographs and were given the options of realistic, staged, or symbolic as well as collage images to convey their message, as per their personal preference. The photographs were supposed to be coupled with narratives describing the image, which included the meaning participants had derived from them and how the images responded to the research prompt. This was followed by each participant giving a presentation on ten selected images supplemented by class discussion and reviews from the rest of the target group members.

The participants were the students enrolled in the course: six women and five men. All were in the sophomore year of their undergraduate degree at the time of the study. They were aware of the PAR approach and willingly opted to conduct a study using the photovoice method. Informed consent was taken from all the participants of the study to use the pictures from their collection as the data source. The selection of the images was conducted by a consensual decision taken by the participants. The final draft of the research paper was also sent to the members of the target group for review before its submission to the journal.

From Fear to Boredom to Hope in Students' Photos

The data for this study include 120 photographs and their captions. Data analysis proceeded as follows. The images were categorized into ten different themes, based on what visually emerged from them and their deeper meaning indicated through the captions coupled with a focused group discussion. There had to be at least two photographs explaining similar aspects for a theme to be formed. However, on average each theme had five or six photographs contained within it. A thematic content analysis was then conducted of all the collected data. As photovoice was a new method for most of us, it took us some time to accustom ourselves to convey ideas through photographs. However, once we got across that stage, the process became much smoother and meaningful and we found our ideas flowed well.

Multiple themes thus emerged from the photographs presented by the participants. During an in-class meeting, the most preferred themes were selected for the thematic analysis. Students shared the themes that they thought emerged from the photographs through the

chat option on Microsoft Teams, which was followed by filling a ranking priority category document prepared by our professor where each of us wrote down our five preferred themes, by our names. Once we started working on the thematic analysis, we re-visited the selection of the themes and added a few new themes based on further communication with the participants. A focus group discussion was replicated online, though it had shortcomings mostly due to connection issues. However, under the current circumstances that was the only medium of interaction available, and while it was not ideal, it was useful, as we did end up adding two more themes and having a more in-depth understanding of what meaning the participants wanted to present as a group through the photographs.

Going through the photographs of our classmates in class and seeing how the lockdown had been affecting them was an extremely personal and intimate experience. In most of our courses, we do not get to interact at such a personal level, but studying qualitative research allowed us to interact with each other at a much deeper level.

Although the thematic analysis is drawn from all the images that our participants captured, we have presented only two or three of them with each theme, based on the consensual decision taken by participants. The themes below range from many different aspects of the lockdown, from student specific experiences to broader aspects such as health and relationships. We present a brief description of each theme followed by an analysis of what the participants presented through their photographs.

1. Lockdown

The contagiousness and novelty of this pandemic has resulted in the application of preventative measures, until a vaccine is developed. The most salient of these measures is social distancing, enforced nationwide with the help of a lockdown. Unused to the quietness now reigning over the busiest city in Pakistan, some students illustrated this emptiness through their photographs.

According to Rose-Redwood et al. (2020, 8), the novel quietness creates a rhetoric of "telling the story of the pandemic", and this sudden de-urbanization will affect the way we think about mobility, relations, and social practices. Karachi is "one the fastest growing megacity in the world" (The Urban Resource Centre, Karachi, Hasan, and Raza 2015, 5) and the most diversely populated city of Pakistan with people from various cultures residing together. It is also the economic hub of Pakistan as it is a coastal city with ports. All this combined makes Karachi a remarkably busy city which is always awake. To see such a city empty, especially in busy spots of the city such as Dhoraji (see Figure 1) and the old Clifton Bridge, was strange to witness for participants (see Figure 2). One of the participants mentioned that the silence was almost scary since there was no activity or sign of social interaction outside. Apart from the looming silence, like most places, Pakistan has formulated regulations that need to be

Figure 1. *A rikshaw-stand during what would have been peak hours in a pre-pandemic world. – Aqib*

Figure 2. *The once hustling bustling Clifton Bridge. Normally this bridge is overflowing with vehicles and my home is filled with noisy traffic sounds. My family and I are so used to hearing them that we didn't realize just how loud these sounds were until a lockdown was in place. Now, one would expect to find peace and calmness with all the noise pollution brought to a bare minimum, but that's not the case. In fact, it has created such a depressing and gloomy atmosphere, given the situation that we are all in. The silence is kind of scary and serves as a reminder that we are living in a very different world, yet we are trying to continue life as usual. For me, as a student it's continuing to study – except that it is online now. – Neha*

followed in public spaces due. A participant highlighted the 'six-feet' distance strategy being implemented outside a shop which had marked circles at a 'six-feet' distance.

2. Trapped and isolated

The most insidious aspect of an enforced lockdown with social distancing and the abrupt closure of community spaces is its effect on psychological health. Research studies on previous pandemics such as the SARS pandemic have highlighted that ten per cent of non-affected and up to 70 per cent of affected populations developed various stress triggers and mood disorders (Taylor and Asmundson 2020, 2).

This feeling of isolation emerged as a potent theme once we analyzed the pictures submitted by the students. The closure of community spaces, such as religious centres, mosques,

Figure 3. *Isolation and suffocation have become synonymous for me. There's a plastic bag around my face all the time. It gets tighter and tighter each day…slowly, slowly, slowly making it harder and harder for me to breathe. Is self-isolation really saving me? – Morsche*

libraries, cultural centers, weekly *mushairas* (poetic symposium), and also the loss of routine interactions at university led to an increased feeling of loneliness among students (Banerjee and Rai 2020). To portray this element of 'feeling trapped' and 'loneliness,' the participants overwhelmingly used the symbol of window grilles (see Figure 4). This highlighted the separation of the inside world from the outside world and the way it has now become inaccessible. That being said, one participant did use window grilles in their photo with an optimistic narrative, showing the clean air outside rather than showing the emotion of feeling 'trapped' - which was meant to be left unsaid. There was also the emotion of 'longing' for the outside world that resonated across many of the photographs. Another participant showed this emotion by staging a photograph of herself being suffocated with a plastic bag (see Figure 3). The strong visuals of the image portrayed how destructive self-isolation could be. Overall, the images used some sort of a barrier between them and what they wanted to reach out for, which was observed as a lack of freedom and physical interaction.

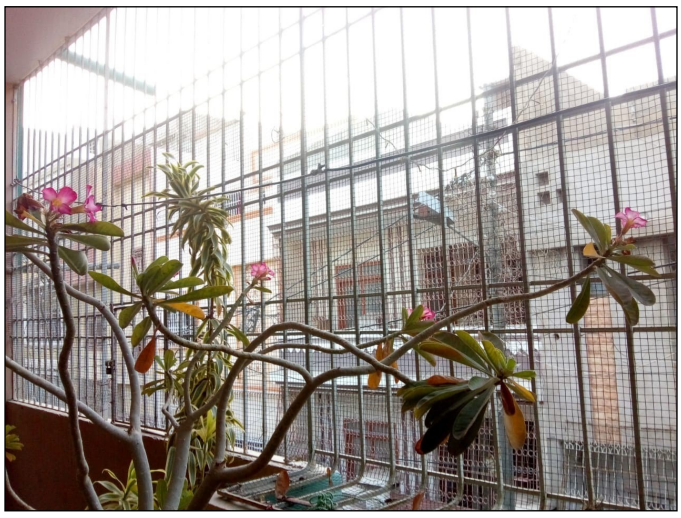

Figure 4. Caged. *There is no window in my room and the terrace is completely packed too* [packed implying that the view outside is blocked by window grilles and is restricted to the small square openings only]. *I haven't been out (AT ALL) since last 4weeks. Makes me feel caged and suffocated. – Azka*

Figure 5. Fear and hope. *While lockdown has hindered every social and economic life, for some students looking out through their windows is the only way to escape the harsh reality that world is going through. This picture depicts hope and fear at same time; fear because despite our deep desire to go out and have fun, one simply cannot, and a hope because with every possible human effort to curb down this pandemic, one starts picturing people in the empty streets.*

Shut, locked and standing behind the bars,
I wonder if I am prisoner war.
But I don't see streets with blood,
And hands with guns,
Then why is our world so shunned?
I hear people are dying
From a virus unknown.
I stand next to my window,
And wait for a new dawn.
Scared, worried, and the peace of mind is long gone.
- Nabeel

3. Health and Safety

Another theme that emerged through this study, was the increased hyper vigilance and paranoia surrounding students' own health and the health of their loved ones. This fear has its basis in the contagious nature of the virus, which could manifest exponentially in participants with already existing illnesses and diseases. One study (Taylor and Asmundson 2020) has concluded that during the current pandemic people have developed a Covid Stress Syndrome. This entails a fear of infection, touching surfaces, contamination and even xenophobia. Similarly it is also concluded that the pandemic may cause an increase in agoraphobia (Taylor and Asmundson 2020, 2).For many students, there has been an increased focus on ensuring protection against the virus by making their immune system stronger. Pre-existing illnesses are also resurfacing as issues of primary concern for parents and patients alike, so that they can be kept under control by ensuring regular

medicine intake and adopting all necessary precautions (see Figure 6). This may mean that the participant has to take more medicines than they would normally have to.

Precautions against the virus have also become essential parts of the participants' lives now, which are slowly becoming normalized and adopted into their regular routines. The most common symbol used to shed light on this matter was hand sanitizer (see Figure 7). Two other photographs also included face masks, which have also become symbolic of pandemics in the past such as the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-1920. One participant chose to highlight the theme of health and safety in a unique way by showing four fresh towels hanging, each meant for a specific person of the family. This aligns with the concept of taking maximum hygienic precautions during the pandemic. It was also meant to highlight a sense of fear that existed within the house.

Figure 6. *I'm scared. Scared that if I catch the virus, I won't be able to fight it off. WHO says those who already have underlying medical conditions are more susceptible to falling victim to this virus. I fall in that category. I live my life on medication. I'm always sick. I'm always in pain. And now, I can't even go out to get treatment because if I do, I might just die. So I stay at home. And take one pill. I take another pill. Then another. Another. One more. – Morsche*

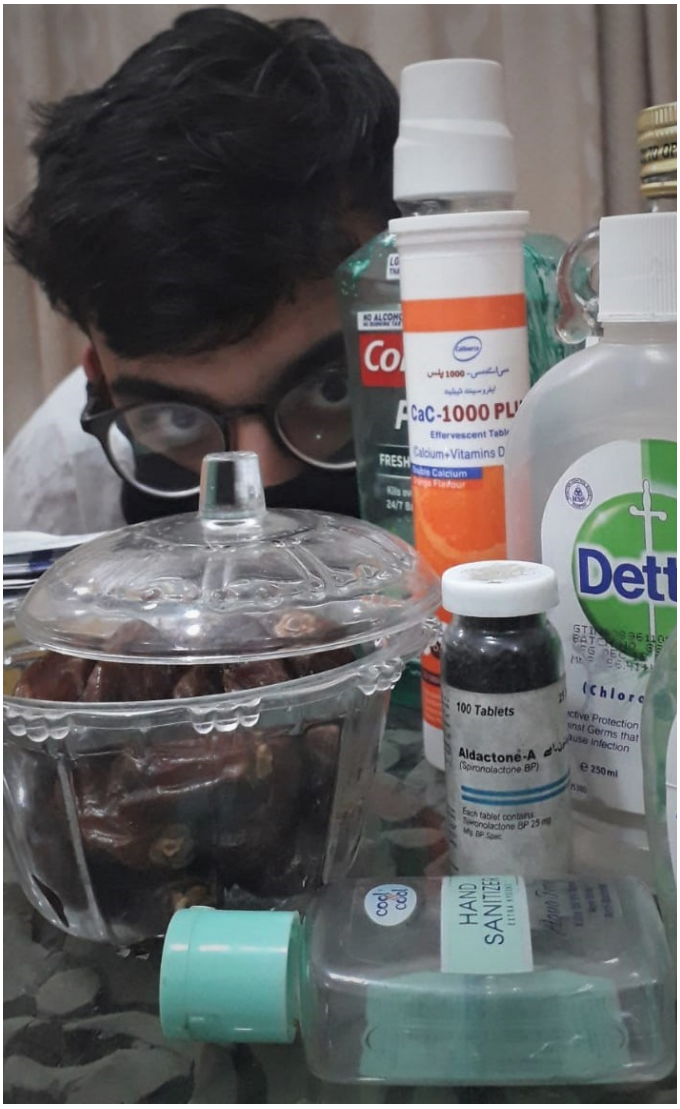

Figure 7. Fear and health. *Sanitizers, Disinfectants, Alcoholic Swabs, Soaps, Hand Gloves, Masks. Beware! You can catch it anytime, anywhere. Use them if you want to survive, cover yourself before you hit the ground. But listen, these are not enough... Wait. Do not forget what the nature has given you to combat it. Have dates, take few drops of olive oil, chew black cumin seeds, and increase your intake of citrus fruits. Believe me, this may help. Just use them as your shield and you might survive.*
Visiting the supermarket after shutting myself at home for twelve days was a sigh of relief. I asked my dad not to turn on the vehicle's AC. I wanted to take fresh air with the window rolled down. Empty roads- in Karachi- a sight I used to have at the iftar time during Ramzan. However, that was a normal Tuesday noon. As I entered the super mart the guard allowed the entrance to only those wearing masks. They were not using the metal detector this time. They were searching for something else and the tech seemed unhandy. My temperature got checked. I was allowed to proceed. 'Six feet away, on the marks only'. A man in all white costume repeated every few seconds. 'Sanitize your hands before you enter'. I started to pray for a safe return to home. Without the dry cough. – Hamza

4. Fear and anxiety

Fear is an emotion that spikes up during times of uncertainty, and it is not surprising to see that most participants felt the emotion of 'fear'. However, the emotion manifested in unique ways. Whilst some feared the monotony of lockdown life, others feared the consequences of the pandemic. The eerie atmosphere created by the unusual silence also contributed to the factor of fear. Other aspects of fear included anxiety about job security and what the future would hold. As the pandemic has brought economies, businesses, and entire ways of life to a halt, there has been a rise in uncertainty regarding jobs, careers, and studies which has manifested in the form of anxiety. These are primary concerns for undergraduate students as this four-year journey is critical for both their future careers and life in general. Witnessing the world in such a turbulent situation has consequently impacted academic performance and created a lot of anxiety and fear amongst students (see Figure 8). Empirical studies indicate that this fear turns into acute anxiety for the potential work force, concluding that long term isolation and distress affect mental health and productivity (Mahmud, Talukder, and Rahman 2020, 8). A participant highlighted that since they were restricted in terms of their daily activities, they had more time to think about the deeper meanings of life, which, without finding answers, led to an endless spiral of anxiety and frustration. In terms of health-specific fear, there was also a fear of the health effects associated with the virus itself which has been discussed above.

Figure 8. Fear, Anxiety and Uncertainty. *In a time where anxiety and fear have clouded over us because of the Covid-19, students despite their persistent efforts to focus on their academics, fail to do so. In this picture a student who is trying to concentrate on his university assignment, has failed to ignore the drastic and severe cases of covid19 shown on the news channel. This picture shows how most of the students are in the state anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. – Nabeel*

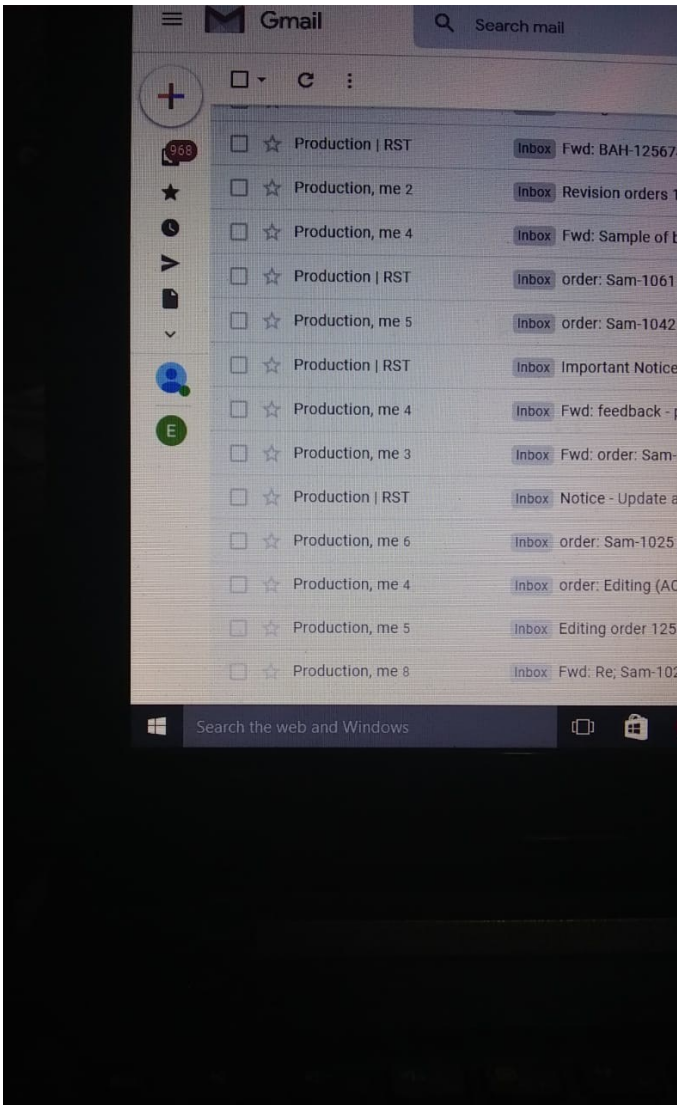

Figure 9. *When your manager doesn't believe that you are actually having online classes as no other university is doing so. Hence, keep pressurizing with added assignments. Not to mention, with salary deduction threats and job loss. – Azka*

5. Study settings

One of the biggest changes in students' lives has been in their study settings. Many participants highlighted this theme in some way or another. Some showed their study areas to portray how they were constantly sitting in the same setting, whereas on campus they would be moving around visiting friends, faculty, and other classes. Thus, there is a sense of laziness, lack of creativity, and unproductivity that

follows from such a study space. Another participant showed an image of their bedside area which was overflowing with wires since everything was now digital and they constantly needed those wires for some device or another which left their space looking messy. Other participants also portrayed the informality of the setting, which was shown by eating food or checking the phone during a class (see Figure 10). This provides a contrast to how formal study settings restrict students' activities and aid them in disciplining themselves. There was also a sense of frustration that accompanied the new study setting since not all participants had a stable internet connection (see Figure 11), a secluded area to study, or a personal device through which they could attend classes. All these problems contribute towards the worries of students and their academic performance. This also highlights how some students are at an unfair disadvantage to students who do not face such issues at home.

Figure 10. *Or maybe the mornings are the same but instead a bit more relaxed and easy-going, where we have the liberty to attend the classes without paying much attention.*
A live and guilty depiction of online classes at home.
– Areeb

Figure 11. Accessibility to Internet. *While some universities have announced to go online, students living in rural areas or with no internet connection have found different ways to catch up with their classes. In this picture, a student is calling his friend to ask and make notes of what his professor has taught that day. – Nabeel*

6. Relationships

Since the dynamics of every aspect of life have changed, so have the dynamics of relationships. Relationships here are broadly categorized as any human-to-human relation. The lockdown has affected some relationships negatively but simultaneously it has also benefitted other relationships. This theme was extremely diverse in the meanings that different participants expressed through it, primarily because relationships are subjective and personal. "Humans are social animals and naturally live in groups for solidarity and support" (Corvo and De Caro 2020, S248). There was an element of loneliness expressed through the photos as social interaction beyond the household has curbed due to the lockdown. "The friendship ties (community spirit) have been affected too because the lockdown rules imposed allowed for seeing and having relationships with only and exclusively the individuals who live in the same house" (Corvo and De Caro 2020, S247). A participant symbolized the absence of physical touch through a lipstick stain, highlighting the importance of physical interaction and the relations associated with it (see Figure 14). Due

to the lockdown, cherished weekly family gatherings at a participant's house can also suddenly no longer happen. Although they meet each other virtually, physical interaction is not possible and that is what the participant misses. One participant pointed out that they were not able to spend time with their family members as education continued online and they had to be sitting alone in a room with their door shut to attend their classes which made them feel claustrophobic (see Figure 13). However, at the same time many other participants also highlighted that the quarantine has allowed them to strengthen their relationship with the members of the household, such as their parents and siblings, by having more time to bond with them and finding comfort in their company.

Education has also been impacted by the relationship with household members. Many students in Karachi live in a joint family system, the extended family as constituted predominantly from the paternal descent line, which makes it difficult to focus on studies, especially when the student does not have a secluded/private space to study which consequently affects academic performance. A participant showed this through a cousin playing a board game while he tried to study in the same room.

Figure 12. *Quarantine was meant to provide a break from the chaos of life but very little did I know that it will break the silence between us siblings and bring back the giggles, otherwise lost amidst the hustles of life! – Areeb*

Figure 13. *It's been almost a month since I have met my friends. We do talk via online channels but that special feel is absent. The idea of having the entire world at one's disposal with a laptop beside just fades into the darkness of loneliness and confinement. – Hamza*

Figure 14. *This is just about missing my friends and being their presence. Physical touch is my love language and I miss my friends' hands all the time. This was a recreation of that feeling. – Rumaysa*

7. Time holds a different meaning

The experience of time has changed for many people, while some people have found that they can now spend time on self-care and hobbies, others also find that boredom has led them to a depressed state of mind (Banerjee and Rai 2020). However, most participants in this study shared that the free time now at hand was utilized in positive ways. A study of the French population conducted by Droit-Volet et al. (2020) explores how people experience time during the lockdown and its link to the general emotional state of a person. It shows that for most people surveyed, time had slowed down and simultaneously there was an increase in stress (6). However, they conclude that there was no link between the perception of time with stress levels rather it was the "emotional experience of everyday life" (10) which affected the experience of time. Increasingly, in our study it was observed that participants were using the lockdown as a time to be able to slow down in their lives, which was symbolized through casually sipping tea, or just even having the time to make tea itself, which they previously did not have. It was also observed that some participants were investing time doing things which they always wanted to do but did not have the time for before, such as learning how to cook and bake.

Figure 15. *What is time?*
Aunt: You guys have cooked bhindi on a Sunday?
*Me: Oh, is it a Sunday today? *scrolls phone to check the date**
Aunt: Yeah, I've cooked Chicken Biryani since we ran out of mutton.
Me: Oh! I've completely lost track of days! – Neha

This once again highlights how life has taken a pause and is slowing down by providing us time to reflect on our lives and its purpose. Since the understanding of time greatly relies upon work schedules, a participant pointed towards how there was no longer a distinction between the days of the week. Usually Sundays are preserved for cooking something special for the family but that is no longer the case since everybody is always at home so special meals can be cooked at any time of the week (see Figure 15). There is no distinction of days

Figure 16. *One thing that really stands out during this lockdown is the silence that surrounds us. Despite working from home, talking to family and friends and loved ones, there is a trail of endless silence that follows us. When we stop and listen to it, it shows us the shifts of time that we often take for granted when running around making a 'life' for ourselves.*
I find that there is peace in the darkness of the night, as I feel it taking me completely within its solemn being, coaxing me to surrender to its serenity. Later, that embrace is ruffled by the calls of birds at the first sight of dawn. Their calls resembling the crowd that all of us are accustomed to. A crowd that we are a part of or rather try and be a part of. Even now the mornings seem rushed as if everything around us pushes us towards a 'purpose' whatever that might be, that is if there is such a thing as purpose. – Mishal

otherwise either, since we no longer have specific days associated with particular tasks, such as relaxing on a weekend or going to work on a Monday. A participant highlighted how time went on, but our lives remained monotonous, this was shown by contrasting two images of the sky, one taken at night and the other taken during the day (see Figure 16). Thus, symbolizing how the passage of time still went on as usual whilst our lives had become stuck in the same physical space. For some participants, life had become even more busy as they were loaded with more and more work by employers, since being at home has created this illusion of having more 'free time' at hand.

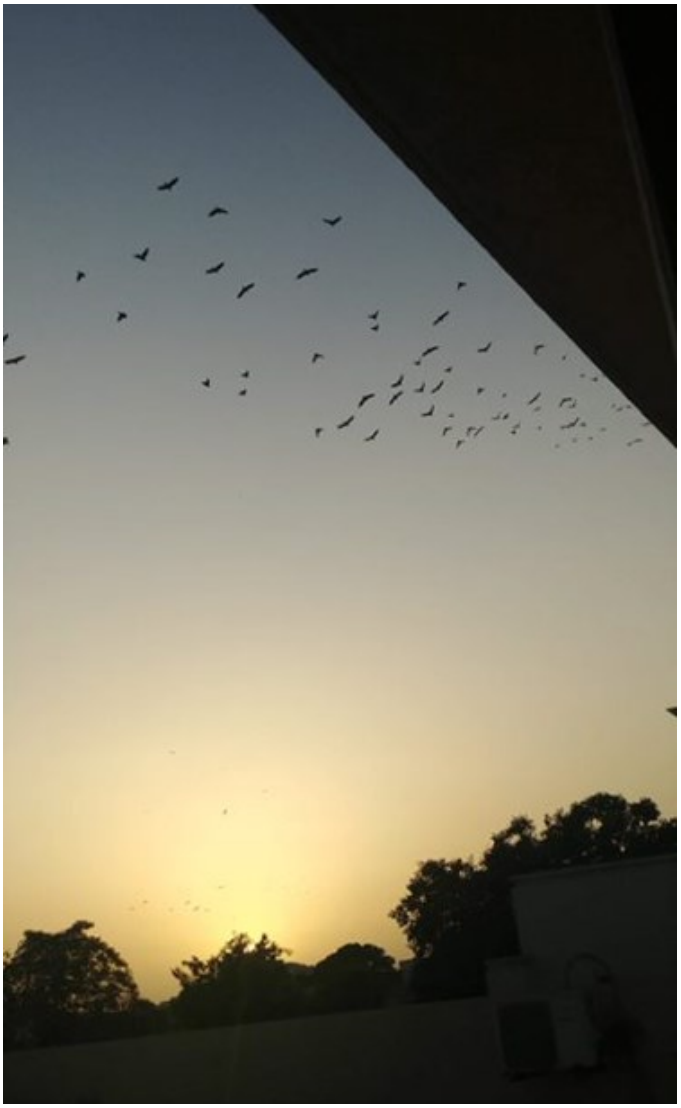

Figure 17. *View from my tea session with flock of birds passing through during sunset. – Aqib*

Figure 18. *In the days of despair, when the time halted to fly, when one began to run away from the screen... I found solace in holding the shovel, in feeling the grains of soil. I waited not for my assignment grades but for something extraordinary to emerge. I was not hopeful though, the surrounding conditioned me to think me that way. It took two weeks and it appeared. It is tiny but it is growing. It is feeble but it gives strength. – Hamza*

8. Hope

One of the other prevalent themes was that of hope. Since hope is not tangible, there were various symbols in the surroundings through which people chose to represent it. There were some participants who chose the sky as a symbol of hope (see Figure 17) whilst another participant chose to symbolize hope through the growth of seedlings (see Figure 18). Seeds are sowed in the darkness of the soil beyond which we cannot see, but soon the seeds begin to germinate and emerge out of the soil like a ray of hope, providing a sense of both achievement and strength. As the night is followed by day, the darkness is also necessarily

followed by light, and so, light has come to symbolize hope - an element seen across multiple photographs, often portrayed by looking up to the sky. Hope was also sought through God and religious devotion, by putting trust in Him and having faith in His power and believing that things will become better soon.

9. Coping mechanisms

Being humans, we all search for sanity by retaining some sense of normality. This may come from various aspects like spending time with the family, or carrying out a hobby like cooking, or devoting time to self-care. Overwhelmingly participants tried to keep themselves busy with cooking/baking (see Figure 19). Aymerich-Franch (2020) conducted a study to observe the change in habitual routines of individuals during the lockdown and found that "Cooking and baking also showed an important increase, as 54.3% of the sample cooked more often and 51.6% baked more often" (6). It is an activity that requires constant attention and thus keeps the mind occupied whilst also being rewarding. It also shows the importance that food plays in our lives, it brings joy, but it is also a source of literal and figurative nourishment, both desperately needed during these times. Other participants also spent time rediscovering old magazines, playing guitar, and playing board games. There was also more time to focus on self-care in the form of personal grooming, which involved makeup and skincare. Caffeine, either in the form of tea or coffee was also something that participants used to cope up with the current situation (see Figure 20). Overall, most of the participants *did try* to do something on their part to keep themselves occupied and help them cope up with the current situation.

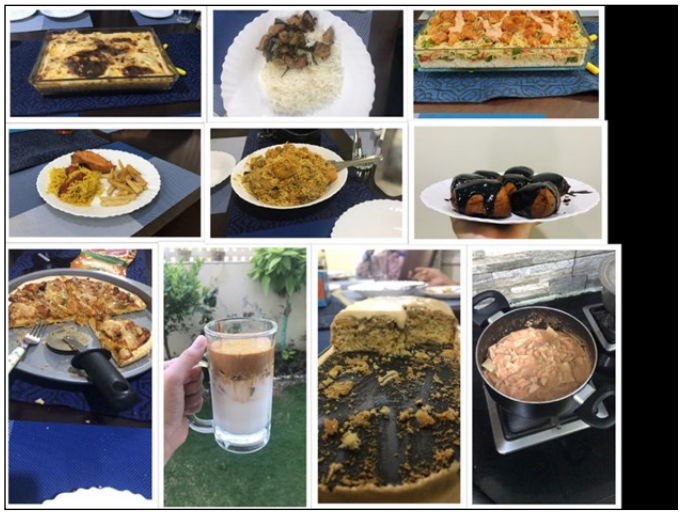

Figure 19. *This picture describes my quarantine life quite aptly. These are a few pictures of the dishes I have made since this quarantine has started. I don't exactly know how I feel about this, though. I mean, I do like to cook sometimes when I am free, which I never was during school. However, now I feel I have been doing it just for the sake of having something to do. This picture is a representation of an effort from my side to keep myself occupied in an otherwise chaotic world. To keep me from thinking about the pandemic. I do this to tire myself enough during the day, so I sleep at night in seconds with no time to think about how long this quarantine will last and for how long we will have to stay inside. I feel the experience with this quarantine of my family members has genuinely gotten better as they get to eat something new and different almost every day. I, on the other hand, am yet to figure out how I feel about my cooking spree. However, this spree also took a recent hit day before yesterday when I realized that it is unfair. It is unjust that people out there are starving while I am out here making different food items, having three dishes on my table. While I sit there being confused between what I should try first, people outside the walls of my house wish for a single meal. – Sara*

Figure 20. *The small tea pot sieve and cup show repetition. I love tea and I'm a heavy tea drinker but I have been consuming too much of it just to feel something. – Rumaysa*

10. Finding solace in nature

Following from the theme of hope and coping mechanisms, nature provides a source of comfort for many participants as well. A study conducted on the role of the environment in recovery from alcoholism also showed that many participants found comfort in different elements of nature, mostly features of the natural environment (Shortt, Rhynas, and Holloway 2017, 150). Some individuals took pictures of the sky or pictures of a landscape. Whilst some other participants "found comfort in tending to house and garden plants" (153). In the urban setting of Pakistan, many participants tried to find some sort of calmness by whatever aspects of nature were accessible to them as

Figure 21. *I have really started to appreciate my garden much more these past few days. Being the daughter of two environmentalists I am most comfortable around greenery. – Mishal*

well. We saw how birds, animals, and plants provided peace of mind and brought serenity into their chaotic lives. Many participants sought to express this through their own pets, such as cats and parrots. Others sought to find calmness through the birds flying across the sky or flowers that were growing in their balcony. There was also an element of finding comfort in the idea that nature was finally having time to replenish itself, as all human activities have been brought to a bare minimum. Another participant highlighted finding comfort by tending to the plants in her garden and the greenery in it, which also helps her stay sane during these complex times (see Figure 21). Thus, a recurring theme of nature providing a sense of calmness is prevalent across many photographs which reflects upon the "traditional notions of healing in the natural" (150) and using it as a medium to recover and retain sanity.

Participants had various responses to the experience of taking these images. A student mentioned finding it difficult to take photographs of their experience as they found it emotionally draining to think about the lockdown and the impact that it had on them. Yet the photovoice assignment was also a good opportunity for students who do not like to speak up in class to contribute to the learning process. This highlights the importance of having more than one mode of communication in qualitative research, which in our case was photography. The photography process also served as a medium for self-exploration and discovery, forcing us to think deeply about things that are only given attention at a surface level.

Figure 22. Calm in the storm. *This was a photograph of a kitten taken right outside my main door on the staircase landing in my apartment. My class was about to begin but I did not want to leave this comforting and calming view (but with a heavy heart I had to head back inside). Covid-19 has for sure made our lives miserable but nature and other forms of life are probably having their best lives for once and that is just so warming to think of. – Neha*

The photos highlight that the lives of students living in the lockdown have both positive and negative aspects: for some students it has been quite a difficult experience, whilst for others it has not been as difficult. The participants may also have experienced each of the above aspects differently; while some participants missed their friends or struggled with online education, others were glad to be able to bond and spend time with their family at home. Overwhelmingly, the students who chose to highlight their educational experience online showed that it was not productive and they either faced issues due to the lack of resources or in adapting to the new study settings. We also observe that almost all students are facing some sort of emotional and mental challenges during these difficult times, which is affecting all spheres of life including academic performance. A study of the impact of COVID-19 conducted among participants living in Spain notes that "the younger cohorts presented a larger negative effect on psychological well-being resulting from the lockdown" (Aymerich-Franch 2020, 9). Thus, it is important for the relevant authorities to take all these difficulties that students are facing into consideration whilst making any decisions pertaining to academic studies and supports or the lockdown in general. The findings also stress how real and important the emotional challenges of the pandemic are, which thus need to be addressed with sympathy and deep consideration. The findings can also be used as a reference for expectations that instructors have of students,

which could be eased by changing the nature of assignments or relaxing deadlines. The photovoice method could also be taken up by other instructors as part of their course, as it allowed the participants to express themselves through a different medium of communication and also allowed for self-discovery.

Conclusion

This paper documented the lived experiences of students residing in urban Pakistan during a global health crisis through a participatory approach. Our study provided the undergraduate students with a platform to share their perspectives and insights on a major and rapid change in their lives. This paper categorized students' life under lockdown into major themes while analyzing their coping mechanisms, sources of hope and frustration, and their quest to find solace in the present circumstances.

With the purpose of the study also being pedagogical, this work presents how to teach qualitative research using participatory methods. Through self-exploration of context and lived experience, it shifted teaching strategy to make it relatable to students. The study further demonstrated to the participants how to conduct fieldwork in a restrained context. The research introduced the participants to PAR methodology and helped them realize the importance of inclusion in community-based research. It also ensured greater flexibility for our participants in terms of space and time, consequently giving them a platform to be innovative and creative. It prompted them to delve deeper into their feelings and experiences which helped to collect more elaborate information while empowering the participants as they directed the course of research.

It also demonstrated the value of community -based participatory research and the holistic results it produces while emphasizing the importance of context in social sciences research. The findings of this study could help managers of higher education in Pakistan and elsewhere to understand the psychological and academic problems faced by the population whose lives they shape.

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