
“The Weaker Vessels”: The Perpetuation of Traditional Gender Roles in the Patriarchal Society of Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet

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Despite strong opposition, feminist literary criticism has survived and grown exponentially since its conception. Though humanity has made many strides in both the developed and developing world, true equality still evades us; this unfortunate fact makes feminism a vital cause and cultural component. Thankfully, there are numerous people dedicated to the preservation of feminist ideals and to the personal, professional, social, and educational advancement of women and other minorities. In the words of scholar Charles E. Bressler, “[f]eminist criticism is a heterogenous grouping of . . . peoples of all walks of life who believe that both women and men are equal” (163). Though united by their belief in universal equality, feminist critics employ a variety of critical strategies and focus on a variety of different subjects.

One popular focus of feminist criticism is “feminist critique” (analysis of the works of male authors, especially in the depiction of women and their relation to female readers)” (“Feminist Criticism”). With a writer as ubiquitous and influential as Shakespeare, it is no wonder that his writing is the subject of so much analysis. *Romeo & Juliet*, with its focus on a heterosexual romantic relationship and its inclusion of a female protagonist, readily lends itself to feminist critique. Traditional gender roles are imposed on both women and men in the play, which causes all the characters to suffer as the oppression of women and the perpetuation of toxic, stereotypical masculinity lead them to emotional pain and often poor decisions.

Even a cursory reading of the play reveals a pattern of misogyny. Among the clearest indications is the play’s rhetoric. In the very first scene of the play, sexist diction pervades. Two Capulet servants, Sampson and Gregory, have a sinister conversation about their master’s enemies, the Montagues:

SAMPSON: ’Tis true, and therefore women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall; therefore I will push Montague’s men from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall.

I will show myself a tyrant: when I have fought with the men, I will be civil with the maids; I will cut off their heads.

GREGORY: The heads of the maids?

SAMPSON: Ay, the heads of the maids, or their maidenheads, take it in what sense thou wilt.

GREGORY: They must take it [in] sense that feel it.

SAMPSON: Me they shall feel while I am able to stand, and ’tis known I am a pretty piece of flesh. (1.1.15-26)

In this exchange, Sampson boasts to his companion about his plans to combat their enemies. He wishes not only to fight Montague’s men—an example of stereotypical male aggression—but to rape and/or kill his women; he speaks of these heinous acts of violence so casually because both the acts themselves and the attitudes behind them are commonplace in the patriarchal society of Shakespeare’s Verona. Because he and his fellow men believe that women are “weaker vessels” than they, Sampson finds no sin or injustice in exploiting their weakness. His quips about raping women until he can no longer maintain an erection and what “a pretty piece of flesh” he will serve as a form of male posturing. The Oxford English Dictionary Online defines “posturing” as either literally or figuratively “posing for effect [. . .], attitudinizing” (“Posturing,” def. n.1). Sampson makes these comments because he knows that they will improve his esteem with Gregory, a male peer; this indicates that men gain social prestige when they exert power over women and other men. This conversation and its implications offer insight into some of the detrimental effects of a patriarchal society.

Perhaps more bloodthirsty than Sampson is Juliet’s cousin, Tybalt. The embodiment of hatred and wrath, he devotes his life to inciting fights with the Montague clan. His brash behavior leads to his death when he pushes Romeo to violence through his murder of Mercutio. By allowing himself to be ruled by anger and impulse, as patriarchal conventions condone, he destroys himself and leaves turmoil (Juliet’s grief, Romeo’s guilt) in the wake.

While Tybalt and Sampson exhibit harmful masculine attitudes and behaviors, Romeo represents a softer, more sensitive male. He is repeatedly berated for lacking the will to fight, making flowery declarations of love, and expressing his emotions. His mother questions his pacifism, when all the other young men in Verona welcome physical and verbal confrontation. Only when Romeo embraces the traditional masculine ideals held by his society does his life begin to unravel. This begins when his grief concerning Mercutio’s murder drives him to kill Tybalt. Afterward, he cries before Friar Lawrence, a male authority figure whose guidance he seeks, and receives ridicule in response:

Hold thy desperate hand!

Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art;

Thy tears are womanish, thy wild acts [denote]

The unreasonable fury of a beast. (3.3.108-11)

Romeo is compared to both a woman—a member of the “weaker” sex—and a senseless animal because he cries with sadness and guilt

over his murder of his wife's beloved cousin. As a man, Romeo is discouraged from expressing grief, particularly over the death of a foe. Men are expected to kill without remorse and rejoice in defeating their enemies. Friar Lawrence's position of authority makes his reprimands all the more devastating, as he may significantly influence Romeo. Like the friar, the play itself teaches a dangerous lesson about being a man: Men may not express their emotions, except those which can be harnessed for violence and domination of other people. Encouraging men to stifle excitement, lovesickness, and sadness while seizing anger and violent impulses leads to pain for individual men as well as their victims both male and female.

Another chief problem in patriarchal societies, the oppression of women, is illustrated through Juliet's experiences with her parents and Paris. Perhaps the most egregious example is when Capulet and Paris discuss the prospect of giving away Juliet's hand in marriage with little discussion given to Juliet's thoughts and feelings. Capulet hesitates initially, suggesting that Paris wait two years before marrying the young lady, but he eventually grows adamant about the union. When Juliet refuses to marry Paris, her father cries out:

Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch!

I tell thee what: get thee to a church a' Thursday,

Or never after look me in the face.

Speak not, reply not, do not answer me! (3.5.159-63)

If she does not bend to his will, he forbids her to look at or speak to him. He even threatens to cast her out into the streets, where she must either starve or become a prostitute to survive. The fact that such grim fates are the only possibilities that await a thirteen-year-old girl outside of her family home shows just how precarious women's positions were in Juliet's society and how little power women possessed in their own lives.

Equally subjugated, Juliet's mother "acts as the voice of Capulet, Juliet's father. Lady Capulet's own agency is silenced, if not suffocated. Consequently, her relationship with her daughter is far from close" (Hatice 42). The emotional distance between the two women stems from Lady Capulet's failure to support Juliet. Rather than providing a nurturing maternal influence, Lady Capulet takes the same disciplinary, restricting role as her husband. Fathers symbolize "ownership [and] domination" and oppose "attempts at independence" while impoverishing, constraining, undermining, and dominating those whom they influence ("Father"); thus, by using his wife as a pawn and a mouthpiece for his own will, Capulet both subjugates her and doubles his power over Juliet by making Lady

Capulet a second father. Lacking even the mischievous, conspiratorial language and behavior of the Nurse, Lady Capulet is the weakest female character in the play.

Juliet, however, defies authority and in turn defies traditional gender roles. As feminist criticism has evolved, critics' views of Juliet have drastically altered: "Critical estimation of Juliet has moved from regarding her as a passive victim of 'star-crossed love' to lauding her as a self-willed, courageous, intelligent young woman who initiates and controls action in her struggle to preserve her integrity and autonomy in a world that is hostile to women," writes critic Carolyn E. Brown (333). In fact, Hatice argues that, "Despite her mother's patriarchal attitude, she [Juliet] attempts to position herself as a subject against the law of the father" (42). In a play depicting such an oppressive patriarchal society, a strong and dynamic young woman such as Juliet is a refreshing addition.

In her time, ladies had no consent over whom they would marry. Their parents, particularly their fathers, married them off to whom ever they (the parents) pleased. Typically, marriages were conceived based on who could offer the greatest wealth, possessions, and status. Attachment and attraction—let alone love—were not significant factors. But Juliet marries in secret, taking agency in a matter where authority figures always prevail.

The most shocking defiance of the traditional female role occurs when Juliet proposes to Romeo, proclaiming, "If that thy bent of love be honorable, / Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow" (2.2.150-1). Daring to address the topic of marriage with a man she just met was unheard of for a woman in Juliet's society. Her boldness pays off, for she soon marries the man she loves. Her life ends in tragedy, suggesting that flouting authority—as she and Romeo do by marrying in secret—leads to one's demise. Even so, Juliet's courage and spirit are admirable and make her a fascinating, likeable figure in Shakespeare's play.

As long as women and men struggle to overcome the stereotypes and restrictions patriarchal societies impose on them, feminist thought will have a place in the literary and cultural landscapes. More than a thrilling romance or a heartbreaking tragedy, *Romeo & Juliet*—with its representation of a patriarchal society that promotes traditional gender roles and ultimately leads to the oppression of all its people—reminds feminists of the progress that has been made and the goals that have yet to be achieved in the quest for equality.

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Abused, Misused, and Memed: Charlotte Temple in a Modern Media Landscape

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Introduction

If you were to visit the Trinity Church graveyard in New York City today, you could see a gravestone adorned only with the block letters “Charlotte Temple.” Standing there, you’d be following in the footsteps of countless people who have made the journey to visit Charlotte’s final resting place over the decades. But who is Charlotte anyway? She is the heroine of America’s first best-selling novel, *Charlotte Temple* (1794), but she is actually a fictional character. No one knows who, if anyone, lies beneath that gravestone in Trinity Churchyard (Davidson xiii). Nonetheless, as the heroine of Susanna Rowson’s immensely popular novel, Charlotte lives on in our literary imaginations.

Charlotte’s story is one of seduction, deceit, and destruction. It begins in England during the American Revolutionary War, where Charlotte, a girl of fifteen, meets a dashing young military officer named Montraville who is about to sail to America. Through various accidents and coercions, Charlotte ends up becoming his mistress, despite his promises to marry her, and going to America. Ultimately, Montraville abandons Charlotte. Penniless, pregnant, and all alone, Charlotte dies just after giving birth and moments after being reunited with her father, who takes her child home to England. Her tragic story has moved readers to tears for generations. It’s a classic example of the seduction novel so popular during the eighteenth century--what Julia Stern calls the American “urtext” of the “gothicized sentimental tale of seduction and abandonment” that warned female readers of the perils of desire and the deceitfulness of men (10). The novel dramatizes Charlotte’s struggle to navigate her first crush in the face of manipulation by both her friends and suitor. In doing so, *Charlotte Temple* interrogates problems of sexual consent that bear an uncanny resemblance to discussions today.

This article investigates those discussions in the form of Internet memes. Memes have become ubiquitous on social media, and recently they have become significant objects of academic study. Memes, as Bradley E Wiggins and G Bret Bowers write, are “artifacts of participatory digital culture,” which essentially means that memes have a substantial cultural presence and complex histories in which practically anyone can participate, as people produce, reproduce, and consume them online (6). Memes function through paradox and surprise; their success depends on appropriately invoking shared conventions while supplying innovative content, as Asaf Nissenbaum and Limor Shifman point out (485). In other words, memes depend on the convergence of both continuity and change in order to supply humor and create critiques. As such, memes are es-

pecially suited to demonstrate the logical inconsistencies and intense emotions of the sentimental mode exemplified in *Charlotte Temple*, because they draw out the strange and absurd dimensions of what at first glance seems normal and familiar. Thus, memes allow us to investigate the dark side of romance and demonstrate the problems of consent in the face of coercion--which vex us today as they did in 1794.

Specifically, this article analyzes the following memes. “Persian Cats and Pissed Off Parents” demonstrates the reaction of Charlotte’s parents when they learn she has disappeared with a stranger. The Persian Cat Room Guardian, with its glassy yet indignant scowl, comedically portrays their dramatic response in a strange, untraditional manner in order to draw attention to the underlying absurdity of their reaction. “Escalated Regret” uses Anchorman’s Ron Burgundy to illustrate the moment Charlotte realizes she got a little “carried away,” meaning both that the situation got out of hand and that she has literally been carried away, and her distress at finding herself so out of control. The final two memes both interrogate the nature of her seduction. In “Coercion versus Romance,” Fry Futurama reveals the disconcerting similarity between the conventions of romance and sexual aggression, using dark humor to expose Montraville’s coercive behavior. And finally, “Adventures of Kidnapping” uses the Most Interesting Man in the World to make a mockery of Montraville and Charlotte’s “elopement,” showing how this seemingly love-sick man is actually violent and disturbing. Overall, these memes demonstrate how *Charlotte Temple* exposes the conventions of romance as shams that both coerce and shame women.

Persian Cats and Pissed Off Parents

For Charlotte Temple’s 15th birthday, her parents decide to have her grandfather bring her home from boarding school so that they can throw a party for her. However, on the intended day, Charlotte’s grandfather doesn’t return with her, but instead with something else: news that she has disappeared with a strange man. Devastated and confused by Charlotte’s sudden disappearance, her parents are left to wonder what motivated her to abandon her family. From Mr. and Mrs. Temple’s perspective, this was completely out of character for Charlotte. When they were planning the party, her mother even said that she is “a grateful affectionate girl; and I am sure she will never lose sight of the duty she has to her parents” (Rowson 34). Of course, in the eyes of her parents, their perception of Charlotte as a dutiful daughter is now shattered and replaced with apparent ungratefulness.

Despite the serious nature of the Temples' situation, the "Persian Cat Room Guardian," meme captures their shock in a humorous fashion. According to Know Your Meme, a wikipedia type website dedicated to documenting memes, this popular image is a "reaction image macro" typically used "to convey an incredulous reaction" in response to irritating but relatable scenarios, such as "when you wake up from a nap and your mom starts yelling at you" (Knowyourmeme.com). By adapting this meme to apply to Charlotte Temple, Charlotte's parents' reaction can be understood without using too much language. In the novel, the Temples are obviously disappointed in their daughter, her mother lamenting about "how ill [has she] requited [their] tenderness" and her father remarking on how "she has forgot[ten] us all" (Rowson 53). While his disappointment at Charlotte's callousness is actually more emotionally complex and described in more dramatized, romantic language, the meme conveys the basic information: her parents are frustrated, confused, and upset, as implied by the seemingly angry expression of the Persian cat and by positioning of the arms which, in terms of human body language, usually indicates confusion.



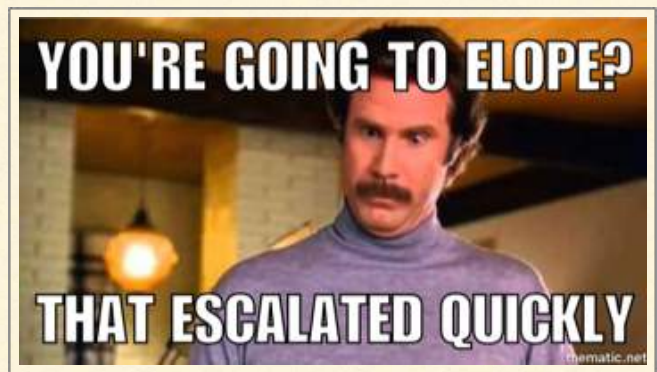
Even though this meme does work when altered to fit the context of *Charlotte Temple*, in doing so it twists both the nature of the original meme and the novel itself. Because the novel is sentimental, events and details are very rarely described in a mundane way. For example, Rowson even describes the tears of Charlotte's grandfather as "large drops of sorrow" (Rowson 51). On the other hand, the meme as a reaction image is "associated with the mundane," putting itself at odds with the novel (Shifman 2). Also, much of the humor in the original iterations of the "Persian Cat Room Guardian" meme lies in its relatability, yet the Temples' situation is anything but relatable. Nevertheless, by going against both the essence of the novel and the initial purpose of the base meme, this adaption embodies the nature of internet memes as a whole. According to Limor Shifman, "Memes are all about mutation," meaning memes are meant to change and evolve as they are circulated (2). While

this meme is not mutating in regards to format, it is a mutation of the meme's context, thus allowing it to evolve without being too far removed from the original meme.

Escalated Regret

The story of Charlotte Temple demonstrates the ludicrous nature of Montraville's elopement with Charlotte. In just a few pages, Montraville goes from spying on Charlotte through a fence to kidnapping her. The plot of this novel escalates at a rapid speed and before the reader realizes what is going on, Montraville and Charlotte have eloped and moved to America. One can only imagine how much of a whirlwind this must have been for Charlotte. She starts the novel as a young, innocent, girl and finishes dead and abandoned in America. The elopement is unforeseen, even to Charlotte. The reader sees her own shock and guilty heart when she writes a penitent letter to her parents. Charlotte writes the letter in "most affectionate manner, entreating their pardon and blessing, and describing the dreadful situation of her mind" (55). Montraville is fully aware that if this letter reaches Charlotte's caring parents, he would have to pay due penance for his evil actions. Charlotte knows she has made a grave error and is writing one last letter to her parents attempting to explain herself. She knows that the situation escalated far too quickly, and that she has made a mistake that eventually ends her life.

The picture from the meme is of Ron Burgundy from the movie *Anchorman*. In the scene referenced, the cast of characters have just finished fighting an idiotic war with other news channel crews. The scene cuts to Burgundy in a room with his friends where he says, "That escalated quickly. I mean, that got out of hand fast." The phrase, "That escalated quickly," has become a huge part of meme sub-culture and is used on a frequent basis. In "The Cultural Logic



of Photo-Based Meme Genres" Limor Shifman says memes "are more about the process of meaning making than meaning itself" (3). Shifman is saying that in the meme culture, the meaning of a

meme is created rather than discerned from the picture. This is most definitely true for the Ron Burgundy meme. Thousands of people create memes surrounding this picture. Each meme can have different meanings, yet they all revolve around the idea of “That escalated quickly.”

Therefore, the Ron Burgundy meme can be well adapted to what is happening in Rowson’s novel, *Charlotte Temple*. Ultimately, the meme fits the novel because Charlotte’s elopement really does escalate at an intensely rapid rate. In the movie, *Anchorman*, the fighting scene had advanced to point of people killing each other. Ron’s weatherman, Brick Tamland, famously says, “I stabbed a guy in the heart with a trident.” The situation they found themselves in escalated quickly. Similarly, Charlotte steps in the boat and travels to the new world with someone she had only known a short time, her situation had also escalated quickly. The meme diction can be adapted here to fit the novel because both situations are completely ludicrous and blown out of proportion.

Coercion versus Romance

Susanna Rowson uses *Charlotte Temple* to illustrate the perils that young women can face when they believe that novels offer a realistic version of love and relationships. The main character, Charlotte, is seduced, coerced, and captured by her suitor, Montraville.

Throughout the novel, Charlotte’s relationship with Montraville changes. Originally, she is excited with his interest in her, and he charms her with sweet words and flirtation, insinuating himself into her life. But as their relationship progresses, Montraville becomes more manipulative and violent towards Charlotte and himself. An example of his questionable behavior is when Montraville, multiple times, threatens to kill himself when Charlotte attempts to leave their relationship. Nonetheless, many of Montraville’s overtures are traditionally romantic and, without context, could be seen as such to young readers; however, Montraville stalks, threatens, and kidnaps Charlotte, ultimately causing her death. Rowson uses Montraville’s extreme behaviors to show young readers that traditionally romantic actions are not romantic but dangerous and creepy.

The text of this particular meme illustrates what Susanna Rowson is trying to warn young female readers of: unhealthy and unsafe behaviors that were stereotypically portrayed as romantic. Rowson’s warning also works in part by assuming that young women would not be able to see through the ruses of unsavory suitors. The meme references Montraville’s courtship of Charlotte. Many of the strategies that Montraville uses to woo Charlotte are sketchy at best; however, Charlotte is blinded by her own infatuation and does not escape Montraville.

The Fry-Futurama meme proves a point about Montraville’s unsettling romantic behavior towards Charlotte. This particular meme offers a rigid format that was simple to create yet stay true to the overall style of the meme. The base of the meme is the screen-grab of Fry, during a *Futurama* episode, looking confused with the words “Not sure if ____, or ____” at the top and bottom of the image, respectively. The meme used for the project says, “Not sure if you’re being a pervert, or romantic.” The text and the image work together because the connotations of the meme complement Montraville’s pseudo-romantic behaviors. Fry, the main focus of the meme, is the main character of the show *Futurama*. He is fairly unintelligent and gullible, and therefore the other characters easily (and often) taken advantage of him. Similarly, Charlotte is constantly misled by Montraville and her teacher Mademoiselle La Rue because of her innocence and gullible nature. This meme gives a humorous glance at what may have been going through Charlotte’s mind when she first began to suspect Montraville’s romantic behaviors.



Meme scholarship helps explain how humor within memes can often offer a critique, which is why memes can work as a mechanism to understand literature. In the article “Humor in the Age of Digital Reproduction” Limor Shifman states that “the capacity of the Internet... to convey and combine all existing communication morphologies... the competence of the internet to store and deliver digitized content...” allows users of the internet to communicate in a variety of ways (4). This is true especially in the case of memes. Memes themselves have the same capacity to “convey and combine” different types of communications (4). Humor is usually the purpose of memes, which use an image and text combination to achieve that purpose; however, humor within memes can be used to prove a point. This meme in particular illustrates Montraville’s overtly, dangerous sexual behaviors while providing humor. The adaptation of the meme used signifies what could have been a humorous moment

of realization for Charlotte about Montraville. Also, the meme can a reference to the reader's own thoughts about Montraville and his sketchy behaviors. Therefore, memes can be used to critique the discourse of romance within Charlotte Temple, reinforcing the novel's warning to warn young women.

Adventures of Kidnapping

Charlotte Temple's sheltered life launches into a series of insane adventures when Montraville enters the picture. While her adventures might be tragic, they are most certainly interesting. The disturbing thought is the enjoyment Montraville gains from seducing fifteen year old Charlotte and subsequently dragging her across the Atlantic Ocean to America. Montraville's little game with Charlotte ends in her death, but not before he leaves her destitute in a foreign country. During Charlotte's suffering, Montraville entertains himself by "advancing rapidly in his affection towards Miss Franklin" (82). Montraville's lack of remorse until the very end of the novel makes one wonder how many other girls he has seduced and left bereft of family, money, and self-esteem.

This particular meme comes from the Dos Equis commercials featuring The Most Interesting Man. According to the Dos Equis website, The Most Interesting Man has had many amazing adventures, including giving himself a tattoo, creating a culinary karate program in Guam, and performing in an acrobatic zip-lining show. While the man pictured in this meme is not the current actor for The Most Interesting Man, he is still an icon for this legend that began as a beer commercial. Because The Most Interesting Man is so recognizable with his catchphrase "I don't always drink beer, but when I do I prefer Dos Equis," he has become a viral meme adaptable to just about anything, including Charlotte Temple.

According to Limar Shifman, "photo-based meme genres. . .are more about the process of meaning making than about meaning itself" (3). Because social media is so littered with memes of The Most Interesting Man, the process of meaning making has already been completed by the time someone comes across this meme. That being said, Dos Equis portrays the original Most Interesting Man in a positive light. For this particular meme, the meaning is flipped. Obviously, the reader is not meant to believe that Montraville's treatment of Charlotte is just another fantastic adventure like those of The Most Interesting Man. Instead, the ironic use of a well-known positive meme allows readers to find humor in the ridiculousness of Montraville's behavior.

By having The Most Interesting Man say, "I don't always seduce 15 year old girls, but when I do, I leave them in a foreign country to die", readers better understand the true cruelty of Montraville's treatment of Charlotte. This point is incredibly important because in the novel, Charlotte takes the majority of the blame for her situation (Rowson 79). In reality, though, who could expect a 15 year old girl to be responsible for being kidnapped by an older man? The use of the Most Interesting Man meme in this ironic way sheds light on not only the ridiculousness of Montraville's treatment of Charlotte but also his previously underplayed guilt for kidnapping and abandoning a 15 year old girl.

Conclusion

Charlotte Temple's story may already seem outrageous, but couched in the such sugar-coated surroundings of eighteenth-century sentimentalism, it requires digging deeper to truly understand the coercion, kidnapping, and seduction at the heart of this story. Using well-known memes that already have an attached meaning allows the deeper themes of Charlotte Temple to shine through the shrouded text. Mr. and Mrs. Temple's over dramatic reaction to their daughter's elopement seems only tragic on the surface, but with the employment of a meme, readers easily see that Mr. and Mrs. Temple absurdly overreact to their daughter not showing up to her birthday party. Montraville and Charlotte's relationship feels like a whirlwind, an innocent, sweep-her-off-her feet romance. However, a deeper look into the text (or, even better, a glance at a



meme) reveals just how quickly they go from clandestine meetings to eloping all the way across the Atlantic Ocean. A dashing gentleman like Montraville could not possibly have anything less than innocent intentions towards his young sweetheart, right? Wrong. It may not be easy for readers to see--it certainly wasn't easy for Charlotte to see--that Montraville effectively coerces and kidnaps a 15 year old girl. Without specific explication of the text, Montraville seems like a lovesick young man just trying his luck with a beautiful girl. Memes, however, allow readers to immediately understand the underhanded tricks and perversion of Montraville's courtship. Inexperienced girls like Charlotte never expected to meet a Montraville. A clear understanding of the seduction, coercion, and kidnapping of an adolescent girl that goes on in Charlotte Temple is crucial to understanding the overlooked corruption and abuse of eighteenth century heroines and, further, the corruption of the conventions of romance and consent itself.

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The Varying Structures and Social Influences of Online Gaming Communities

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ABSTRACT

There are many types of online gaming communities which often operate and are structured very different from real world groups. The purpose of this study is to investigate the interactions of online communities and how their structure and social interactions differ from real world groups and communities, as well as the relationships between their members through the use of different forms of communication media. The communities of interest focused on Massive Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG), and investigated the stigma of online gaming being seen as anti-social, which has been found to be the opposite. The concept of Real Money Trade (RMT) in competitive games was also more prevalent than expected.

The structure and influence of online community interaction is an area that has been investigated partially, but changes in communication technology and trends require newer investigations and information. As technology continues to advance, simple groups (Nardi and Harris 2006) and people constantly adapt to these changes in communication which create social environments structured much different and more advanced than before (Fernback 2007). These social groups and communities can be very different from real world groups. Further research between the similarities and differences of online and offline groups is important.

The varying types of online communication platforms and technologies that are being used to communicate between individuals and groups also affect these social interactions. The individual users' experiences within different online gaming communities will also varies as each community has their own unique members and viewpoints which can change due to the factors of time, current video game and offline life, but each is involved in a highly social environment.

Communities

The use of the internet as a social platform is increasing as technology continues to advance. In this study I investigate the world of online groups which are referred to from this point as Virtual Communities (VC) also called “Guilds”, most times with a focus on massive multi-player online games (MMOG). I find this field interesting partially due to being a participant in the field which will allow access to communities, but mainly because of the unique culture and experiences that others might not ever be able to recognize or become aware of. This study investigates different types of leadership structures, how technology can supplement this, community dynamics and which type of structure is perceived to be the most successful both in short and long term scenarios.

A social network is one part of a virtual community. A VC is a group of people with similar expectations, goals and interests in mind with a platform that can disregard great differences in physical location (Gunawardena, Hermands, Sanchez, Richmond, Bohley and Tuttle 2009). One universal necessity of VCs that affects the community heavily is its internal structure and use of administrative tools; whether both of these are strictly organized or not, they are always in place, especially in MMOG’s (Wellman, Haase, Witte and Hampton 2001; Nardi and Harris 2006). These rules are often stated. They can even be as simple as “be nice and have fun” as well as include unwritten rules shared by members; however, it will always depend on the group. Some VCs can be very structured with a large chain of command while others can have a figure head leader with power deriving from a democratic system focused on the members. The internal structure is very reliant on the use of supplemental technology and members to maintain it in order to provide communication and interaction between the group and individual members (Wilson and Peterson 2002). Certain members in a group often invest their time and effort and, on occasion, money for administrative or leadership purposes to allow the group to continue to function properly (Butler, Sproull, Kiesler and Kraut 2007). These investigations lead to the following questions: what are the dynamics of Virtual Communities and how are they created? What variables and or methods allow a community to evolve and maintain itself over longer periods of time?

Influence of Online Communities

VCs can have enhancing effects for individuals in regards to social capital and a sense of belongingness but the opposite can also occur with excessive or improper exposure. In the context of this study social capital can be viewed as a member’s community commitment. According to Wellman (2001) social capital is gained when people care greatly for their community, have a strong sense of belonging and willingness to work for their group. This sense of belonging can also be attributed to gratification of members when the group as a whole benefits (Butler, et al. 2007). These benefits within the setting of an MMOG, specifically focusing on the game Archeage include: completion of world content (within the game) that requires teamwork, coordination and skill between many members of a guild (VC), often while competing against another group. This content within the game setting can include but is not limited to: difficult and contested bosses, completion of dungeons, acquisition of property as well as control of resources for monetary gains. Completion of such tasks ranging from smaller groups of players (2-10) as well as for larger ones such as one or several guilds working together (10-200 players) can begin to form a sense of community and commitment. However Wellman (2001) observed that high use of the internet actually weakened a member’s commitment to an online community.

The reason for a decrease in commitment arose from the unpleasant exposure to other members who are annoying or simply frustrating to interact with, which becomes more likely as the internet is used excessively and especially in larger groups. In smaller online groups, however, there are more opportunities to interact with members in a more personal manner to build social capital through the entirety of a community, instead of being one voice drowned in a sea of others (Nardi and Harris 2006; Fernback 2007). There are many different VCs involved in each MMOG which creates many questions of interest. How do different VCs interact with each other in competitive play and on a player to player and VC basis? What characteristics or actions influence how a player perceives another Virtual Community? By being able to interact with more than one group within a larger community (such as a MMOG) it would allow members to choose who they play and spend their time with, unlike real world interactions where it is not as easy. What has made an individual choose this group over others? Trust between members and control structure of a VC could influence this decision.

VCs are often very social environments with game mechanics and communication technology in place within and outside of their respective online game for members to communicate as a whole and to other individuals efficiently. This ease of access allows for the creation of social roles, social identity of members within a group as well as group norms and especially discourse (Souza and Preece 2004; Gunawardena, et al.

2009; Gleave, Welser, Lento and Smith 2009). These roles could also include in game strategies for a distribution of tasks, such as healers, defenders and attackers in order to play efficiently and accomplish goals. As stated earlier, groups often have shared goals, interests and expectations in mind; however, another aspect that is more relevant to the social environment is shared meanings and group culture.

Shared meanings are terms and concepts understood by the group as a whole in relation to their field of focus, often of organic creation and sometimes without knowledge of the origin. One example of a shared meaning is the abbreviation “AFK” short for “away from keyboard”. This shared meaning has its use within the game and other forms of communication platforms in order to notify fellow players of their activity status. Shared meanings within a community are often heavily influenced by the game the members are participating in. The words “Divine Ayanad Life Katana” most likely will not mean much to people who do not play the game Archeage. A “Divine Ayanad Life Katana” is the highest tier of weapon (Ayanad), Divine being the grade (7/10th highest in the game) which is rare to achieve and often costly. The Life portion is the specific version of the weapon (katana): each weapon at higher tiers has 7 possibilities with different stats on each, assigned randomly upon creation. The katana (weapon) is used primarily by melee characters that focus on strength stats in the game Archeage to maximize damage; however, the Life possibility of weapons grants only the spirit stat which is primarily used by healers, making the extra stats near useless for a melee character. There is a bit of irony involved in this as well as a Divine Ayanad Life Katana is a very strong weapon; however, the extra stats aside from damage have no use for the characters that would use a katana. Included below is a table showing the weapon grade upgrade chances referred to as regrading and potential for breaking items (Figure 1.1).

Archeage v2.9 Regrade Chance Table of Weapons, Armor & Accesories							
Current Item Grade	Charm Used	Chances of Success From Scroll			Chances of Failure		
		Regrade Scroll +1 Grade	Resplendent Regrade Scroll +1 Grade	Resplendent Regrade Scroll +2 Grade	No change	Downgrade to Arcane	Item Destroyed
Basic	No Charm	100% to Grand	80% to Grand	20% to Rare	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Grand	No Charm	40% to Rare	32% to Rare	8% to Arcane	60.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Yellow	60% to Rare	48% to Rare	12% to Arcane	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Rare	No Charm	30% to Arcane	24% to Arcane	6% to Heroic	70.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Yellow	45% to Arcane	36% to Arcane	9% to Heroic	55.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Arcane	No Charm	30% to Heroic	24% to Heroic	6% to Unique	70.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Green	52.5% to Heroic	42% to Heroic	10.5% to Unique	47.50%	0.00%	0.00%
Heroic	No Charm	25% to Unique	20% to Unique	5% to Celestial	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Blue	43.75% to Unique	35% to Unique	8.75% Celestial	56.25%	0.00%	0.00%
Unique	No Charm	20% to Celestial	16% to Celestial	4% to Divine	80.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Yellow	30% to Celestial	24% to Celestial	6% to Divine	70.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Red	40% to Celestial	32% to Celestial	8% to Divine	60.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Celestial	No Charm	10% to Divine	8% to Divine	2% to Epic	0.00%	45% to Arcane	45.00%
	Superior Red	20% to Divine	16% to Divine	4% to Epic	0.00%	40% to Arcane	40.00%
	Silver	25% to Divine	20% to Divine	5% to Epic	0.00%	37.5% to Arcane	37.50%
Divine	No Charm	7.5% to Epic	6% to Epic	1.5% to Legendary	0.00%	0.00%	92.50%
	Superior Red	15% to Epic	12% to Epic	3% to Legendary	0.00%	0.00%	85.00%
	Silver	18.75% to Epic	15% to Epic	3.75% to Legendary	0.00%	0.00%	81.30%
Epic	No Charm	5% to Legendary	4% to Legendary	1% to Mythic	0.00%	0.00%	95.00%
	Superior Red	10% to Legendary	8% to Legendary	2% to Mythic	0.00%	0.00%	90.00%
	Silver	12.5% to Legendary	10% to Legendary	2.5% to Mythic	0.00%	0.00%	87.50%
Legendary	No Charm	2.5% to Mythic	Using a resplendent scroll does not change the odds. Also items cannot upgrade past Mythic. (+2 Grades)		0.00%	0.00%	97.50%
	Superior Red	5% to Mythic			0.00%	0.00%	95.00%
	Silver	6.25% to Mythic			0.00%	0.00%	92.50%
Mythic	Highest Possible Item Grade	Highest Possible Item Grade				Highest Possible Item Grade	

Figure 1: Regrade Chance Table

The idea of this weapon is an informative based shared meaning, understood by a large majority of participants of the game, but to some it might have other values or experiences associated with such a phrase. Organic or cultural shared meanings would be specific to that group. These shared meanings can be expressed through inside jokes, shared experiences, events and or ideas specific to the discourse of the group.

The term social role can apply to many different areas of interest online. In relation to online gaming it will be evaluated in terms of members' responsibilities, type of membership and expectations of and for the group, being very similar to a social contract (Gleave, Welser, Lento and Smith 2009). Each of these factors has a large impact on interaction within the group as well as decision making and behavior of the individuals involved. With so many elements being part of a VC, what makes it successful and how that success is defined by the group can vary greatly.

In competitive games information such as the regrade chance table (Figure 1.1) are important for the success of a group. There are many in game mechanics and logistics which affect how the individuals of a group perform certain tasks to compete for objectives, resources or even improve personal skills, all of which are can promote the success of a group. When it comes to MMOG's knowledge is power, if one group has a better understanding of a game mechanic and can utilize it correctly it can mean the difference between victory and defeat for the respective groups.

Research of Massive Multiplayer Online Games

When it comes to research on MMOG's there has been very detailed research focusing on demographics of MMOG's as a whole (Yee 2006) This research however, often focuses directly on one particular online game: World of Warcraft also known as "WoW" (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell and Moore 2007). Research into WoW has laid the foundation for future studies on MMOG's prevalent social atmosphere and communications. The online world is constantly changing and the methods of communication and interaction between members in virtual communities is advancing in congruence with technology and the games played by people (Bell and Kozlowski. 2002). There have been several influential MMOG's within the last 3 years that have had very large user bases and impact on social environments online comparative to WoW. These include titles such as Guild Wars 2, Archeage, Black Desert Online and Destiny. The first 3 titles being PC (Personal Computer) games, and the last being for consoles such as PlayStation 4 and Xbox One. New titles are always on the horizon with different social aspects and implications that would be beneficial to study. A comparative

study between how members interact in different settings and VC based on game titles and platform could allow varying perspectives on experiences in online settings.

Therefore areas left unstudied include the evolution of social interaction over time in virtual communities, the effect leadership roles online can have in offline life, which types of community structures work best for communication and even the acquisition of trust between individuals online extending beyond in game trading. Another topic which has not been explored much is the acquisition and organization of information that online communities need in order to perform better than another VC. As in most competitive games knowledge can make the difference between victory and defeat. This research addresses the following topics on VCs: What are the dynamics of Virtual Communities and how are they created? Why do individuals chose this group over others? How are trust and social capital gained and lost between members online? I also examine the types of communication and social media members use outside of the game itself to interact with each other. This study seeks to explore some of these areas by using sociological field research methods of observation and semi structured interviews.

Methods

In order to better understand VCs I used qualitative field methods. For this topic qualitative research methods are best suited because numbers and statistics will not paint a clear, nuanced picture of how members interact on a social level with each other. Field methods allow for observations of others in the field without disturbances as well as letting the participants contribute their own experiences and stories clearly within the understood context. Being a member of this community allowed me to have a profoundly greater understanding of the perspectives of the people within this study and their unique culture pertaining to the game and environment which they are a part of. For those interviewed which were not part of the same community as myself, I was able to comprehend concepts and universal components of guilds and online communities to understand these individuals' stories and experiences.

I chose this topic for several reasons, but one of the largest factors was my access to this online community of people who play online games together on a regular basis. The games the group and individuals play can change often but the community retains a certain "core" group of members. I have interacted and made relationships with individuals and the group within this community both active and passively over 2 years. I was the original gatekeeper of this study which also allowed people to be comfortable while being interviewed and willing to participate. I also reached out to a friend of

mine who strives in being active in several guilds and communities at once, having many connections within a vast array of communities as a gatekeeper. With his help I was able to interview participants from other MMO games with larger populations. Some of these games have not been released yet, but several communities have already been established.

The second reason I chose this field of study is that it is a very interesting and different experience compared to face to face interactions. Almost all interactions between members occur in the form of voice communications through the PC program TeamSpeak 3 (referred to from here on as TeamSpeak) or Discord, and supplemented by text chat within the online games themselves, in this case being the Massive Multi-player Online Game (MMOG) Archeage. Gaining access to the main community studied was not difficult as I have communicated and played games with some of the members heavily in the past. These factors allowed me to conduct semi-structured interviews with members of the group without constraints and allowed the members to feel comfortable sharing personal and specific content with me, as opposed to being a total stranger. Later during this study I found it beneficial to compare the experiences of players and guild leaders within the game Archeage to those of communities from other game titles. The games that some participants focused on either currently or in the past included Black Desert Online and Tales of Elyria, the first being an established game which has been available since March 3, 2016 in North America and the second not having an announced release date as of yet.

Research Field

I will go into further detail about the dynamics and functions of TeamSpeak referred to often as “TS” by players in text communications. This is an interesting field to investigate because of the many different components involved within this field and social setting. The field and access of the social environment is not rooted in one physical location or means of communication, but instead is made up of several varying components that create the on-line experience of MMOG’s.

The common components or programs used include, but are not limited to, TeamSpeak , the Archeage game client, google drive applications (ex: google sheets and documents), Slack and even Facebook to interact and communicate between members. I will begin by describing in detail the anchor of online communication for groups, this being the most commonly used voice communication program that I have observed in groups within the Archeage community, being TeamSpeak .



Figure 2: TeamSpeak server

I observed individuals in the virtual setting of a TeamSpeak server in the context of the PC game Archeage. Associated with most highly social games with many players MMOG’s are often TeamSpeak servers specific to individual groups (or guilds) which are a social setting for voice communication and a comfortable environment for members to share outside of the game itself.

Anyone can use this service to host a free server which allows for moderation and control of its members through the use of passwords and administrative powers, although there are some benefits to having a dedicated server with a small monthly subscription fee. Admins are able to rename channels, set privilege powers to allow others to join the channels and more. This program also allows for distinct organization of com-

munication between channels. Channels can be considered “rooms” where all members in the channel can talk freely with anyone else in the channel in a group setting, given that standard privileges have been distributed. Administrators are also capable of setting up “all-call voice binds” which allow them to make announcements to all members of the TeamSpeak server simultaneously. It is also possible to create channels which are password protected and other members cannot see the current members in said channel, either by having the privilege powers or asking a member with said powers to create the channel. This type of channel can be used for a private space, as well as for meetings of leadership members. I will describe in more detail the workings of TeamSpeak, as a strong understanding is essential to the communications involved.

To a first time user this interface can seem a bit overwhelming; however most of the TeamSpeak server features have been established by moderators and are rarely changed by users. On the left most portion of the window we see different colored chat bubbles with check marks (). These are individual channels within the entire server. Each member within a channel can hear and speak to each other freely without restrictions, given they have the right permissions or, most commonly referred to within groups, “tags” or “perms” given by administrators of the group. Tags allow a person to move freely between different channels, view the channels and their members and be given specific privileges or power within TeamSpeak. These tags can also be removed by administrators with ease. The purple “D” () (for Dysfunctional) tag allows these basic rights for members in this particular community.

Tags also have even more functions, such as specific voice communications that only members with a certain tag can hear (not common in this group but available for use) as well as permissions that grant only certain powers. During one of the interviews for example, the guild leader was able to unknowingly interrupt the interview by using an all-call bind that applied to all members with the Dysfunctional tag (), (which myself and the participant possessed) to advertise that he was in search of one more member to complete a dungeon within the game. These permissions or tags can be assigned by an administrator simply by right-clicking a user on the server and choosing from a list which permissions to grant the user. There are also small flags next to the user names that show their location in the world which are assigned by the TeamSpeak program through the use of IP address.

Another aspect used by some members within TeamSpeak is the use of soundboards. Soundboards are individually mapped sound files which can be played to all members within the room, often

times being references to common media such as movies, television or music. However, I have also noticed that on rare occasions these can be recordings of members of the online community when they have said something that is deemed interesting or humorous. The administrative and interaction tools were used in order to prevent interruptions during interviews; however, during regular observations no changes were made in order to avoid disrupting members’ interactions. During these observations soundboards were used very few times by members, perhaps only once or twice. In past experiences their use was more prevalent; however, those members who participated in their use have not been present often within the TeamSpeak server during the time observations were conducted.

The game being observed in the virtual setting called Archeage is a free to play game which only requires the creation of an account and a download of the game to access although certain features are only available to “Patrons”. Patrons have purchased a month-to-month subscription available through real money (\$15 per month) or in game funds. The research field however is not limited to either TeamSpeak or the game Archeage; it is a dichotomy of the field itself. The main community studied and observed included both newer and older members. This was the only community closely observed due to my direct ties and ease of access to the field. Interviews however included individuals from different guilds and communities spanning more games than Archeage.

Observations

I observed players of Massive Multiplayer Online Games both in-game and on social media platforms outside of the game with a heavy focus on TeamSpeak. Within the game I observed how members interact in their respective guilds through text communications; this was achieved by being a member of the guild. In-game interactions included 1) observing players in popular locations such as in game cities with high user traffic and events the guild participated in together, 2) in game chat services and 3) spots in the world which require competition for resources between groups and individuals. These different locations were included in order to have a wide range of experiences within the game in order to better understand the game culture and without limiting the research to one specific location or set of interactions. I also accompanied players during the completion of in-game quests and dungeons which require cooperation between members. I also simply followed players for brief periods of time.

I believe both in-game and out of game (TeamSpeak) observations are both important to understanding the interactions of individuals and community members as a whole. TeamSpeak communications

are more personal and an established environment in which users will most likely be more comfortable with specific social norms and rules established already. The in-game behaviors of players could have a vast difference in range of interactions as they can have different standards and expectations of how players communicate based on their group (guild), playstyle or even server. Playstyle is how the individual chooses to play the game, some enjoy purposely harming and intruding on others, whereas some enjoy helping strangers or focus on personal advancement. Another possibility for observations within a game could have included the differences between players' behaviors and interactions of two different servers within the game. Servers are the same in terms of content and events but the populations are different as not everyone can fit comfortably on a single server, therefore there will be different people on different servers. I chose to focus on observing one server within the game as it was where the community being observed was located.

Semi-Structured Interviews

This research relied on qualitative sociological field research methods therefore interviews were essential. The majority of the members I interviewed were active or past members of the current community I was involved in (Archeage,) focusing heavily on members who have been a part of it for more than 3 months. The reason for this is that an accurate description of a community and its members depends on the individuals who have greatly or are still currently active in its social environment over a longer period of time. However, I also noticed the influx of activity of the online community was in sync with the game population itself; this made me turn my focus to some newer members as well as leaders of other communities in different games. These members had an influence on the guild at the time they were present, even if short lived. Some of the individuals I interviewed have managed guilds between the sizes of 40-1200 people. This could give great insight on the structure of their communities and its rules.

There was also variation to the type of questions asked to individuals who had little to no leadership experiences within online communities and those who have. For members that were not leaders I focused on the experiences they have had within the game themselves, as well as their experiences with leaders of their guilds. For those who have led guilds or been active members within the leadership of their communities or guilds, I inquired as to how a guild functions, the expectations of their members, struggles of a guild leader and also the size of their communities. Members interviewed outside of the main community were from different games and have

been in leadership roles in varying communities. To understand the structure of a VC it requires comparisons between others of its kind to be made.

I recruited members I knew personally by I simply stating my research topic and asked if they had any interest in helping me. For the individuals which I did not know personally a previous member of the main community observed connected me with several different people, each of which had been very active in leadership positions of their own guilds. Online interactions can be much easier and simple for some people especially in an online game setting with similar experiences, which made sharing these experiences easier.

The interviews took place in a TeamSpeak server with a specific channel only accessible by myself and the participant. Precautions were taken to prevent anyone else from disturbing or listening to the interview in order to assure accurate information and to maintain confidentiality. Precautions included having a specific channel for the location of the interview which can only be accessed with a password, as well as preventing anyone else from seeing the members of the channel to retain confidentiality.

The average length of interviews ranged between 17 to 60 minutes depending on the quality of responses. The participants' average age was 24 years old, the majority being in their early to mid-20's with two individuals ranging from 38-39 years of age and one being 53 years of age. Eight out of 10 participants were male and two out of 10 were female.

A standard interview protocol was used for each interview with slight variations to questions asked depending on the person interviewed. A copy of the protocol is available upon request.

Findings

Social Environment

In interpreting the data, I found that a large part of the reason members choose one group over another, as well as what being in a guild means to them is simply the connections and friendships that they form within their groups. Every participant interviewed in this study mentioned that they play online games for the social environment it offers. Tyrion was asked if they ever took other people's schedules into consideration for any reason. This person responded that their very early daily routine before getting ready for school included playing the game with others:

I mean it's nice, as I wake up at 4 in the morning for school, back in the day I could always rely on my Australians to be on Team Speak. For me to go play the game with, to go fish with or whatever. And I miss that, I miss that sooooo much! Aww you have no idea how much I miss that! That was great.

This goes to show how impactful these frequent social interactions can be for individuals within the group. From the data and interviews I found that many players simply enjoy the company of others in the online setting of MMO games.

At times there appears to be a stigma associated with online gaming which implies that the players are isolated or anti-social individuals. This is completely contradicted by my research. Every participant I interviewed mentioned in one way or another that they play online games to have fun with others, especially the frequent social interactions it provides. One individual named "Vinnie" mentions this concept of video games being perceived as a non-social activity:

So I think computer games are seen as this solitary endeavor when it's actually like an incredibly community driven thing. It's always about the people around you, and even the people you're against or with it's always just about people. The game play or the games are just a backdrop to that interaction

Tyrion mentions this when asked what drove him to create guides to help others:

I want to see the game in general doing well and I want to see the players within it progressing and enjoying it because obviously at the end of the day you can't have fun in a game without other people and if other people aren't having fun they are not going to stick around in the game.

This definitely emphasizes the focus MMO games have on the communities of the game as a whole as well as smaller more personal relationships with players within communities and guilds.

The friendships people have formed online also seem to be very similar to real life experiences for most. "Frosty" mentioned that: "It's the same as being in any group or community of friends, it's just the point is to have fun with people, like-minded people that share similar interests and goals.", when asked what being in a guild meant to them specifically. When asked about what future games "Pod" had in mind to play, "Pod" had an interesting response which gives insight into the ideal community for them:

I want to play another MMO with everybody, but I want to play one where my significant other can be involved again. And where people will like my significant other, so there's that....Plus I really love everybody in this community, and I really love my significant other, so I would just love if all the people I love could just get together and work well together.

What I found most interesting about this was the fact that the next MMO the person had in mind depended on the involvement of both their significant other and the community which they are currently part of, hoping for almost an ideal environment without any specific details on the game itself.

I also found that communities and guilds form similar to real life clubs, arising from close friends or individuals with similar interests and goals in mind. Participant "Curly" states that:

I think I'd have to say the guild is more of a social thing. It's just where a group of friends can catch up and do stuff together. You see those little social groups, everyone has a group of some sort. And they have clubs in real life, works the same way here.

Another individual from Ireland who has led several guilds mentions a similar scenario:

I suppose it's like any activity. If you go down to the local field and play football, that's soccer. With your friends, it's the same sort of thing. you just you enjoy doing the activity and I always find doing an activity with people I like is better that's what a guild means to me, doing something I already enjoy with people I enjoy which is like an exponentially more enjoyable experience

People tend to schedule much of their activities in online groups together. This was especially necessary for the main guild being observed as there were both Australian and American players working together. The guild leader of one group mentions:

We definitely run into a lot of problems of 'when do we schedule Guild meetings?' Because when the Americans are awake a lot of the Australians are at work. When the Americans are sleeping the Australians have come home from work and have gotten on the game. Realistically the only time we can do things is on the weekends but we can't do it on a Sunday for the Americans because it's a Monday for Australians. – "Mystagon"

Many other participants besides those living in vastly different time zones mentioned taking another person's schedule into consideration for both communications, organization to get things done as well as time set aside to simply enjoy the game together.

Toxicity

On a competitive basis when the stakes are high VCs seem to interact with others in a very toxic manner when they are on the winning side; but in standard competition there is a much more sportsman-like conduct between players in groups. When asked about his reactions when winning “Darius” states: “if I kick someone’s ass I like to shit talk them;” However, when I asked if they act similar when losing he responded: “Not really, I’m more so trying to figure out why I lost. Not shit talking all that much because I lost.” A similar response came from “Frosty” who compares the attitude of toxic players, with the board game Monopoly.

The toxicity and the negative attitude, I always equate it back to like playing Monopoly with that kid that just flips the board when he lands on Boardwalk it’s like you know the game might not have been over but now you did end it and that’s what it’s like when you’re playing with a toxic player.

This topic of toxicity was brought up without prior context by another respondent when asked what would make him dislike one group more than another. He says;

Toxicity to be honest that’s about it. Players that... specifically people that are winning and they start bragging about things and they start talking down to other players that maybe aren’t as ahead in the game as they are stuff like that. Anybody that puts other players down for no real reason other than their own personal gain or personal accomplishment...I can’t stand players like that because it just drives people away. – “Tyrion”

Another respondent “Mystagon” mentions the reasoning behind why someone might be toxic in an online game setting:

Everyone is toxic in their own right. Everyone has things that piss them off so they act out. In an online game you don’t have to be mature or tolerant about anything you can just let everything go because you’ve got a screen in front of you no one can really see who you are. You’ve got a massive anonymity, in terms of your character in game. A lot of people take that and really abuse it. In terms of just being racist or abusive to just downright childish.

Building Trust Online

Building trust online was harder for most people than in real life. Often trust was determined by the behaviors and personalities of others but also included a vouching system from trusted individuals. However, the main way for trust to be built between players was through social interaction, exclusively in the form of voice

chat, not text. The reason for this was that people could identify personalities and behaviors much better to determine the trustworthiness of the individual. “Darius” states that: “if you don’t talk like in voice I won’t trust you at all”. “Tyrion” mentions a similar reason with a bit more elaboration on the behaviors of the person needed to gain their trust:

...sitting and talking to me for an extended period of time and over time you slowly start to trust people, also just seeing their behavior and interaction with other players is a huge one like if I know they’ve had a situation to break somebody else’s trust and they chose not to because they don’t feel like it’s a good thing to do.

The common theme among people interviewed seemed to be that trust depended on the environment created by the game but relied mostly on the behaviors and personalities of the people involved, these having to be gauged by the individual deciding whether or not they can be trusted. “Vinnie” states that:

I think there are just certain traits and behaviors that would signal to me that someone is trustworthy. And likewise their signals and traits and behaviors that signal to me that people are untrustworthy. I can’t really describe them in detail it’s sort of almost like an intuition that you build up from interacting with people and talking to people as you would in any sort of social endeavor.

In regards to communication outside of the VC’s TeamSpeak, all but one participant used some other form of media to keep in contact with other players. The only participant which was against adding others to social media outside his realm of games mentioned it would “break the immersion of the game” meaning that it interfered with the intended experience of the game itself.

My research also recreated another interesting concept I noticed between two different guild leaders. This occurred when asking the question: “If you have made guides or organized information for others about a game, what drove you to do this?” Both respondents mentioned that they did not personally make any guides but rather enjoyed showing the members how to perform the task themselves, and the personal satisfaction they had from watching the player learn and advance themselves. The first leader “Mystagon” said:

That’s the biggest thing about being a leader of a community it is being able to teach someone something and then have them execute it. It’s extremely rewarding especially once you do that content and you can hand out a nice item or an achievement to someone

The second guild leader “Vinnie” mentions:

Sort of an enjoyable social experience to guide someone from being a total clueless person into finally being able to... for example in a PVP game, you bring someone into the game and they can't kill a single person. Then you spend a bit of time with them and teach them some ideas and mechanics behind the game, and they go around and they are killing everyone. It is really satisfying to help people on that journey to find enjoyment in the game

Organization of leadership roles, focusing on a delegation of labor within a group and also acquiring knowledge and information was deemed highly important to these members of guilds who had high expectations for the groups in which they were involved. These themes were particularly present in groups who sought to compete against others and worked towards “end-game content” which was referred to as the ultimate goal.

Leadership Structures

For those actual leader or leaders within a community a few different approaches as to how decisions are made and who runs the guild operation were mentioned.

“Frosty” states:

The ones that are usually successful have an authoritarian rule like dictatorship with a small council of sympathizers for the plebs. It's usually the most successful guild structure and I think it's just because players are attracted to organization and structure and when the game doesn't hand you organization or structural tools players are going to go to the most structurally sound locations they can find.

Another similar account is given by “Vinnie”:

Typically they tend to be dictatorships. There is this really strange thing that happens online where democracy just creates problems. So it's much better to in my opinion run these sort of communities as a sort of benevolent dictatorship.

Beyond the authoritarian structure of leaderships also mentioned were those of a somewhat democratic system, in which there was a small group which worked together to come to decisions for the rest of the group. “Mystagon” mentions this:

Leadership structure has always basically been a counsel sort of system. It's the best way to allow everyone to have a voice, everyone be heard but at the end the leader ultimately makes a decision otherwise it can get a bit 50-50 on what everyone wants and someone does need to step in and sort of make that decision.

A supporting account to this comes from “Tyrior” who states:

Most of them have always been relatively the same you have kind of one person who is the voice of the community and then that person will have co-leadership basically I guess where they kind of speak their opinions to the head more or less. Then decisions are made based on that it's all fairly open I guess people have the ability to voice their opinions, everybody has an equal say when decisions are made off of the general consensus of everybody's opinions.

There also was consensus on the role of an officer within the guild. The roles were based on what roles were needed most and or delegated by the leader. However, officers were also often mentioned as someone to keep the peace and even as a human resources position at times, as well as being the voice of different groups or cliques within the guild as a whole.

“Frosty” describes this at length:

I think an officer's role more so than anything is to provide the small council sympathizer aspect and make sure that people's voices and opinions are heard and that the clever ones are filtered out and put through to the guild leader so that the idea doesn't look like a guildy (guild member) is telling a guild leader what to do it is that he's voicing their concerns to the officer and the officer discusses it with the GM...it creates a degree of separation between the GM and the average guildy which is good because you want the GM to be a little bit revered otherwise they lose that fear and respect right? You want to be both feared and respected to be a successful guild leader so having a degree of separation you have good guys in the middle it sort of helps that a lot and obviously officers also generally represent smaller groups of communities within the guild because in most situations a guild of 50 members plus it's hard for every single one of them to be a friend of each other. So often times officer rankings will grow and shrink depending on the number of cliques in a guild and the officers will be there to generally manage the discourse between the cliques.

“Patches” added that “an officer is just a person who delegates authority and it would depend on what they've been delegated to do and then that would be the role... or teaching new players things. Every facet of the game can be delegated to.”

A more detailed description is described by “Vinnie”:

That entirely depends on the context of the officer's role. An officer could be something as simple as leading an engagement. He might just be leading a squad. An officer could also completely vary to managing the entire economy in an advanced game system. So it really depends on the context but generally speaking it would be to

provide a buffer zone between the top-level leadership and the general membership with regards to answering questions, providing training, and resolving interpersonal disputes basic sort of leadership.

Real Money Trade

I also became more aware of how prevalent Real Money Trade (RMT) was between some players just from observations, and later asking whether or not the person had participated in RMT either as a buyer or seller of goods. At least half of those interviewed mentioned they did participate in these activities. However one individual was strongly against this. “Dolphy” said:

Well let's put it this way I as a person who has tested a lot of games and is in a Guild that is very strict about NDA's (non-disclosure-agreement) and that sort of thing. If I'm being an honest person I would never do something that was illegal. So if it was legal... I suppose I might if somebody had something I really wanted. I never played the game but I knew somebody that used to make things in Second Life and sell them and he supposedly earned a lot of money doing that he said. That was a legal thing as far as I know. So if I really wanted the item then I suppose I might, but typically no. I don't do that, I don't see a reason for it.

Offline Interactions

Very interesting are those occasions when online communities meet those close friends or community members in the real world. A few of the individuals interviewed have actually met others in real life whom they had originally only met through their online communities, with a common interest in video games.

Often times location seemed to be the leading reason as to why people did not meet up with others; however, this did not mean that everyone was eager to meet others, as the friendships often times revolve around the games that are played, but not in other parts of their lives. One individual dubbed “Patches” mentions that he does not like meeting others in real life due to this reason:

I knew they lived...like 20 hours' drive away, but happened to be flying down to where I lived...and not wanting to be an absolute dick I didn't say “oh I don't want to see you” but I was most definitely hoping their flight didn't take place...contrary to my belief there was no downside to that meeting... it does make things a bit awkward. But at the end of the day I guess it's something I prefer not to do but I guess when I do it, I don't mind as much...it's all right, I just prefer not to.

A more humorous example includes “Mystagon” who tells a story of exchanging a case of beer for a computer:

Yeah so the computer I'm using right now. We realized that one of the guys in the Guild lived around the corner from me and he was like “Oi you need a new computer? I'll trade you this computer for a case of beer” so I went down to the shops, bought a case of beer and rocked up to his house and traded a case of beer for a computer!

Discussion

As a result of my research, I found a highly social environment for players involved with MMO games, focusing mainly on voice communications but also having contact with others outside of the game itself, such as through Facebook, Skype, Discord and other forms of social media. Participants also often spoke fondly of their past experiences with others in online games, having a particular focus on the friends and relationships they have made over time, many of which were still active. I believe this to be one of the most important parts of this study as the members involved in online communities form very active friend groups and appear to maintain friendships over long periods of time distance and even through different cultures of the world. This was definitely supported by literature work by Gunawardena (2009) which focused on overcoming great distances between individuals. The success of a virtual community is definitely determined by social factors and the software functionality (Souza and Preece 2004).

Both of these works have similar conclusions on the success of VCs. The data presented in this study also supports these statements as technology has been ever advancing in the online world, especially in the MMO world, but the social aspect still remains an integral part of a VC's success. There have also been allusions by participants that those who do not participate in online games are often seen as anti-social or isolated individuals, when in fact my findings suggest the opposite. Previous research is very similar as Souza states: “What is quite clear from

the number of vacant community spaces on the Internet is that technology alone, even state of the art technology, does not guarantee a successful online community. Success is determined by social factors (i.e. sociability) as well as software functionality and usability. In fact, in some communities sophisticated software design seems to have little impact. However, well designed software can make a successful community even more successful” (Souza 2004:580).

Not everything is perfect in online communities, however. Often brought up by participants was the topic of toxicity also known as being excessively rude and detrimental to social experiences, toxicity being essentially bad sportsmanship within games. These behaviors and actions very rarely occurred between members in the same group. Instead players were toxic to members outside of their group. These conflicts occurred mainly due to competition between other players and were especially present when players could rob and attack one another for personal gain of resources or even personal satisfaction, which the game mechanics themselves allowed and at times promoted. These reactions of toxicity from others were always shunned by the participants who spoke of their experiences. The reasons for these negative reactions were the time and effort involved with accomplishing tasks, which could then be denied by others; these certainly evoked a negative response by the players. My findings are not reflected in previous research as reviewed by this work; however, further investigation into literature focusing on the toxicity of players within MMO games would allow for a comparison.

Another interesting concept was the difference in personality and ideals of players who were often just members in groups, and those who would lead them. The leaders preferred to teach through active participation, opposed to a stand-alone guide or tutorial to teach their members how to perform or learn tasks. I believe this to be the case due to time constraints on the leaders as well as their personality. The guild leaders who were against creating guides mentioned the satisfaction they would receive from advancing a player with little to no understanding of the topic, to attaining the skills simply through demonstration and practice. This process of growth was what the leaders enjoyed most about working and leading others in MMO games.

The leadership structures within guilds also seemed to follow a few common principles in regards to the role of assigned officers within the guilds. These officers would be appointed by the leader and often times were representative of the smaller groups they came from when they were in a counsel setting of rule with the leader. Officers however also seem to be the driving force of these communities,

working to pick up any slack. The positions and responsibilities of officers vary greatly depending on the game itself as well as the structure of the community. Some officers might be assigned to perform certain tasks within the game that can only be done by assigned leaders within said game. However a large portion of responsibilities of these officers within the community depended on the delegation from the leader as well as what specific tasks need to be completed. These officers can be delegated to perform a very wide range of tasks, often one or more specific task per officer. These could include leading others in player versus player (PVP) engagements, player versus environment (PVE), guild economy and assets, to recruitment of newer players and even a form of human resource positions. The positions depend on the needs and interests of the community or guild as a whole and will be delegated as such.

Trust is also an essential part of online communities. Trust was built between members simply through interactions with other people. The main route of gaining a person’s trust relied on voice communications through programs such as TeamSpeak or Discord. It was agreed by participants that text chat did not allow for an individual to read the intentions or personality of others. Voice communications did allow for trust to be built over time. This does not mean that anyone with whom a person talked would simply be trusted with either in game currency, items or real money. This is the most common way trust was formed but it was also relative to the individual, who ultimately had to weigh whether or not they could trust this person or not. The literature closely related to building trust in online communities (Ba 2001) investigates trust through repeated interactions as well as being part of a group which boasts a particular reputation or a network of trust. The findings in this study enhance the research conducted previously as it includes a voucher system but also takes into consideration the presence of others in online communities through the supplemental technology of voice communications, allowing for more personal relationships. The vouching system within groups simply relied on the approval or referral of a trusted person. If someone needed to make sure that someone could be trusted, there was a social method to determine this. The individual (Person A) asked a person whom they already trust greatly (Person B) if an unknown or new individual could be trusted (Person C). If Person (B) says they can, then Person (A) would then most likely trust Person (C), through a vouching system.

Lastly, this research has shown the effect technology is having on online communities within games. Through the use of technology it allows for groups to maintain high levels of interaction and organization of members. This is done through both voice platforms such

as TeamSpeak as well as more common forms of social media such as Facebook. Previous research has shown the advantages technology creates for groups online.

Conclusion

This research did come across some limitations, one of which being the decline of active players both within the group observed and as a whole for the original game being observed. This decrease in activity between members prevented supplemental evidence such as personal interactions between many members simultaneously through text chat within the game. Many of the leaders of prominent guilds within the game Archeage were suspicious and turned off by the idea of conducting an interview about their communities. However this did allow me to reach out to many more community leaders of other games who were much more responsive and allowed for a broader spectrum of responses about online communities. Another part which made the research process more difficult than it needed to be was the extensive list of interview questions. The questions were all in relevance to online communities but did not always focus on the leadership of guilds, causing the interviews to vary greatly in length, preventing more time to be used on observations and research. To combat this the amount of questions were greatly reduced and also when interviewing guild leaders or those who have managed communities the questions catered more towards their leadership and experiences with the groups they managed.

The largest limitation with this form of research however was the lack of information and accessibility to similar literature works and research. Most data and research focused on much broader topics such as online communities which are not specific to online games. There was little information to use as a solid anchor of ideas which related directly to VCs based on MMO games and especially the differing types of leadership structures. Future research topics that should be explored would include the prevalence of Real Money Trade (RMT) within MMO communities outside of the specific game studied, the characteristics and personalities different leaders hold both in small and large scale groups, the varying types of guild structures as well as a more detailed look into how communication technologies influence the relationships players build online with others. Other topics that could also find interesting results include: Reasons as to women being less frequent or known in online communities, how the mechanics of a game and structure affect how a community structures their leadership, time management skills of players of MMO games and also how different platforms of commu-

nication such as TeamSpeak and Discord affect and build a community.

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The Honors Difference: A Multivariate Linear Regression Analysis of the Social Influences Contributing to Academic Performance in Honors Students

Kevin Edward McPeak

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to quantitatively evaluate the impact that selected social aspects of the lives of Honors students have on Honor students' level of academic performance. Honors programs and Honors colleges are proliferating at higher-education institutions across the nation at an astonishing rate (Seifert, Pascarella, & Colangelo 2007), yet research concerning Honors students is primarily limited to findings that confirm the high academic performance of Honors students (Cosgrove 2004). Utilizing data collected via survey from a sample of student members of an Honors program (n=125) at a mid-sized rural south university, a multivariate linear regression analysis measured the influence that choice social factors had on academic performance. Among the selected social factors were level of self-esteem, Honors housing status, the strength of the sense of community within Honors, strength of identification with Honors as a group, and the level of positive experiences with professors. The findings suggest that the strength of a student's identification with Honors, as well as a student's level of positive experiences with professors, are important components of an Honors student's life which contribute to overall academic success. These findings are discussed through a symbolic interactionist lens and recommendations for future research are made accordingly.

Introduction

Honors programs and Honors colleges are proliferating at higher-education institutions across the nation at an astonishing rate (Seifert, Pascarella, & Colangelo 2007). The limited body of research (Achterberg 2005; Rinn 2004) that exists concerning Honors programs outlines some of the effects that Honors programs have on Honors students and the campus environment, like the possibility that Honors students serve as role-models to the general student body (Brimeyer, Schueths, & Smith 2014). However, most studies focus primarily on the purely academic effects of Honors programs, like the rise in GPA at graduation compared to non-Honors peers (Cosgrove 2004) or the heightened one-year retention rate of Honors students (Slavin, Coladarci, & Pratt 2008). Although these findings are important and have forged a strong introduction to research on Honors programs, more research is necessary to understand the full range of Honors students' experiences as members of Honors programs, which are a relatively new subculture on college campuses (Rinn 2004). Research on this topic need not end with the confirmation that Honors students perform better academically than non-Honors students, but rather the next step in the process is to seek explanations as to why. This pursuit is altogether necessary, considering the key finding that Honors students are not innately more intelligent than their equally gifted non-Honors peers (Carnicom and Clump 2004). Although studies exist that demonstrate the academic outcomes of Honors Program participation (Cosgrove 2004; Slavin, Coladarci, & Pratt 2008; Shushok 2006), little research has been done to explore the aspects of Honors students' lives that are not purely academic, such as the nature of relationships among Honors students and the content of their social lives, and how these social factors may be affecting academic performance. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to quantitatively evaluate the impact that choice social aspects of the lives of Honors students are having on academic performance.

Literature Review

The body of research that exists on Honors students is wholly incomplete and conclusions of previous research inconsistent (Rinn 2004; Achterberg 2005). In regard to its incompleteness, there has been a tendency to focus so much on academic outcomes when it comes to Honors students that all other aspects of their lives have been virtually ignored. Research has been too acutely focused on academic outcomes thus far, and a concerted effort has not been made to understand the attributes of the social components of an Honors program that may be conducive to academic success.

The conclusions of previous research are also quite inconsistent, and understandably so, considering the sheer number of Honors programs in the nation and the sometimes glaring differences between them. Honors programs can vary rather largely in comparison to one another, including differences in their size, the faculty and staff committed to them, the type of university in which they are situated, and the admission requirements that are determined internally at each institution. This can make knowledge produced about Honors programs difficult to generalize when the focus of a study is purely on outcomes. However, a focus on the students themselves and the cultures they belong to in their Honors Programs might yield an understanding of Honors Programs that transcends issues of funding, faculty, or admission standards. Analyses have been conducted concerning topics other than terminal outcomes, though. It is worth outlining what has been learned about Honors programs, their students, and the differences between them and their non-Honors peers.

Honors students' college experiences are characterized by greater academic challenge and a higher quality of instruction than that of their non-Honors peers (Seifert, et al. 2007). It is unclear whether this is an inherent result of participating in an Honors program or if it is the result of conscientious students choosing to take advantage of every resource available to them at the university. In other words, perhaps the Honors student's impact on the Honors program is the cause of apparent success, or perhaps it is the impact of the Honors program on the student. The results of previous research appear to support the latter sentiment. For example, Honors students do not appear to perform any differently than their equally gifted peers who are not Honors students when it comes to GPA or time taken to graduate, although the GPA's of Honors students are significantly higher at the time of graduation (Cosgrove 2004). These findings are accentuated by the claim that Honors students are not inherently better at studying or retaining information (Carnicom and Clump 2004). Honors students even attribute their success to effort and ability in much the same way that non-Honors students do (Siegle et al 2010). These findings seem to suggest that it is the Honors program having an impact on the student.

The differences between Honors students and their non-Honors peers become clearer when the microscope is not so closely focused on GPA outcomes. Indeed, a good deal has been learned by studying the personal and social attributes of students rather than outcomes (Author 2016; Rice, Leever, & Christopher 2006; Shepherd and Shepherd 2014). For example, even though Honors students do not inherently retain information better than non-Honors peers, they do exhibit a significant proclivity for critical thinking and abstract

thinking (Carnicom and Clump 2004). Additionally, Honors students appear to possess a higher level of emotional intelligence (Castro-Johnson and Wang 2003) and higher levels of civic tolerance (Shepherd and Shepherd 2014). These findings alone still do not explain why differences in academic outcomes exist between Honors students and their equally gifted non-Honors peers. If the personal attributes of Honors students hold relatively true for their equally gifted non-Honors peers, there must be something about the Honors program that fosters academic success in some way. However, the following hypothesis will test an important personal attribute as it may relate to academic performance: H1: As level of self-esteem increases, level of academic performance increases.

The value of an Honors education appears to be tightly bound to the social opportunities that Honors programs have to offer (Author 2016). For example, many Honors programs offer Honors-exclusive residence halls, which effectively concentrate a large portion of the program into one building. Students who live in these academically-based Living and Learning communities report a stronger sense of belonging and are much more likely to have intellectual conversations outside of the classroom (Wawrzynski, Madden, and Jensen 2012). These Honors residence halls offer opportunities for social growth and mentorship among Honors students, which can be hugely beneficial for those students that have developed maladaptive academic feelings or behaviors (Rice, Leever, and Christopher 2006). Studies have already been conducted which sought to explain the impact of Honors housing on academic performance, but the results have been inconclusive (Rinn 2004). While some studies have concluded that academically-based housing has a positive impact on academic performance (Blimling 1989), others have concluded that place is unimportant to high-achieving students as it relates to their performance (Stewart 1980). To further uncover the impact of Honors residence halls as they relate to academic performance, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H2: Honors housing residents will have higher levels of academic performance than students who are not Honors housing residents.

Honors programs also offer an opportunity for students to become part of a more general Honors community, regardless of their living situations. In a recent ethnography of an Honors Program at a medium-sized southeast university, for instance, Author (2016) found that there are a number of important social influences in an Honors student's life that play a role in personal and academic development. Among these were the depths of the intellectual bonds experienced between Honors students, the degree to which Honors students identify with one another as Honors students, and the strong sense of community in the Honors Program. Given these findings, the following hypotheses will be tested regarding the nature of Honors students' sense of community in Honors and their identities as Honors students:

H3: As sense of community increases, academic performance increases.

H4: As group identification increases, academic performance increases.

Lastly, Honors programs also offer opportunities for students to build rapport with professors, reflected by the fact that Honors students are far more likely to visit professors during office hours (Shushok 2006). The following hypothesis will test how Honors students' relationships with professors relate to their academic performance:

H5: As level of positive experience with professors increases, level of academic performance increases.

In summation, the existing body of research has established an important groundwork for understanding some characteristics of gifted students and their level of academic performance as compared to non-Honors students, but the focus of future research must be shifted toward understanding the complete experiences of Honors students, as well as uncovering aspects of their social reality that may be contributing to academic success. Although it has been established that Honors students perform at higher levels academically than their equally gifted non-Honors peers, little progress has been made in the way of explaining why this is the case.

Research Design

Data

The data associated with this study were collected from the student membership of an Honors Program at a mid-sized rural south university (n=125). The Honors student population, about 500 students, received an email inviting them to participate in the survey. Those who participated answered a series of questions intended to measure the students' self-esteem, their residential status as it pertained to Honors housing,

their perceived strength of the sense of community in Honors, the strength of their identification with Honors as a group, their level of positive experience with professors, and their academic performance. A number of control variables were measured as well, including race, gender, academic class status, level of participation in Honors, level of high school performance, and degree of frequency having difficulty paying attention in class.

Dependent Variables

Academic Performance. Academic performance was operationalized using an index consisting of ten survey questions that measured participants' perceptions of their own academic performance which produced a scale variable ranging from 0 to 10 (see Table #1 for descriptive statistics). The questions asked participants to indicate a level of agreement with each statement presented, and response options were (0) "Strongly Disagree," (1) "Disagree," (2) "Slightly Disagree," (3) "Slightly Agree," (4) "Agree," and (5) "Strongly Agree."

Table #1: Descriptive Statistics for the Index for Academic Performance

Index for Academic Performance	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α		
	7.78	1.58	1.4	10	.903		
Indicate your level of agreement...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
I work hard in my academic work	1 1.0%	3 2.9%	2 1.9%	11 10.5%	42 40%	46 43.8%	105 100%
I have high standards for myself	1 1.0%	1 1.0%	1 1.0%	6 5.7%	47 44.8%	49 46.7%	105 100%
I consider myself successful in school	1 1.0%	1 1.0%	7 6.7%	15 14.3%	52 49.5%	29 27.6%	105 100%
I am meeting my own academic standards	4 3.8%	7 6.7%	7 6.7%	26 24.8%	39 37.1%	22 21.0%	105 100%
I am proud of my academic performance	3 2.9%	3 2.9%	4 3.8%	24 22.9%	47 44.8%	24 22.9%	105 100%
My parents/guardians is/are proud of me	2 1.9%	2 1.9%	3 2.9%	12 11.4%	28 26.7%	58 55.2%	105 100%
I put forth more effort in class than others	3 2.9%	2 1.9%	11 10.5%	23 21.9%	44 41.9%	22 21.0%	105 100%
I have a strong work ethic	0 0%	7 6.7%	2 1.9%	15 14.3%	45 42.9%	36 34.3%	105 100%
I always give my best effort on assignments	1 1.0%	4 3.8%	8 7.6%	22 21.0%	48 45.7%	22 21.0%	105 100%
School work comes before leisure activities	1 1.0%	3 2.9%	10 9.5%	21 20.0%	40 38.1%	30 28.6%	105 100%

Independent Variables

Self-Esteem. Self-Esteem was operationalized using an index which utilized the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory. The inventory took the form of ten survey questions that measured participants' self-esteem and produced a scale variable ranging from 0 to 10. (see Table #2 for descriptive statistics). The questions asked participants to indicate a level of agreement with each statement presented, and response options were (0) "Strongly Disagree," (1) "Disagree," (2) "Slightly Disagree," (3) "Slightly Agree," (4) "Agree," and (5) "Strongly Agree." Five questions were reverse coded in order to achieve consistent meaning throughout all ten of the survey questions.

Table #2: Descriptive Statistics for the Index for Self-Esteem

Index for Self-Esteem	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α		
	6.19	2.08	0.6	10	.937		
Indicate your level of agreement...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	4 3.7%	9 8.3%	7 6.5%	29 26.9%	39 36.1%	20 18.5%	108 100%
I feel I have a number of good qualities	2 1.9%	2 1.9%	7 6.5%	25 23.1%	52 48.1%	20 18.5%	108 100%
I certainly feel useless at times	7 6.5%	9 8.3%	22 20.4%	23 21.3%	31 28.7%	16 14.8%	108 100%
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	19 17.6%	37 34.3%	30 27.8%	11 10.2%	8 7.4%	3 2.8%	108 100%
I am able to do things as well as most other people	1 0.9%	2 1.9%	9 8.3%	31 28.7%	48 44.4%	17 15.7%	108 100%
I wish I could have more respect for myself	6 5.6%	18 16.7%	13 12.0%	35 32.4%	21 19.4%	15 13.9%	108 100%
All in all, I'm inclined to feel I am a failure	25 23.1%	36 33.3%	15 13.9%	16 14.8%	9 8.3%	7 6.5%	108 100%
I feel I am a person of worth, at least the equal of others	1 0.9%	4 3.7%	12 11.1%	23 21.3%	47 43.5%	21 19.4%	108 100%
At times I think I am no good at all	16 14.8%	23 21.3%	17 15.7%	27 25.0%	14 13.0%	11 10.2%	108 100%
I take a positive attitude toward myself	4 3.7%	11 10.2%	14 13.0%	26 24.1%	41 38.0%	12 11.1%	108 100%

Honors Housing Residency. Honors Housing Residency was operationalized using the survey question, "How many semesters have you served as an Honors housing resident?" The question produced a scale variable ranging from 0 to 5, which was then collapsed to a dichotomous variable with the responses options (0) "0 Semesters" and (1) "1 or more semesters." See Table #3 for descriptive statistics.

Table #3: Descriptive Statistics for Honors Housing Residency

How many semesters have you lived in Honors housing?	0 Semesters	1+ Semesters	Total
	73 61.9%	45 38.1%	118 100%

Sense of Community. Sense of Community was operationalized using an index ranging from 0 to 10, which consisted of eleven survey questions that measured participants' perceived sense of community within the Honors program (see Table #4 for descriptive statistics). The response options for each question were as follows: (0) "Strongly Disagree," (1) "Disagree," (2) "Slightly Disagree," (3) "Slightly Agree," (4) "Agree," and (5) "Strongly Agree."

Table #4: Descriptive Statistics for the Index for Sense of Community

Index for Sense of Community	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α		
Index for Sense of Community	5.98	2.15	0	10	.955		
Indicate your level of agreement...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
I feel like my fellow Honors students care about me	4 3.4%	6 5.1%	13 11.0%	45 38.1%	45 29.7%	15 12.7%	118 100%
There is a rich sense of community in Honors	4 3.4%	12 10.2%	16 13.6%	33 28.0%	33 28.0%	20 16.9%	118 100%
I have found it easy to make friends in Honors	3 2.5%	15 12.7%	9 7.6%	35 29.7%	31 26.3%	25 21.2%	118 100%
Honors has made it easy to find others like me	5 4.2%	15 12.7%	13 11.0%	34 28.8%	30 25.4%	21 17.8%	118 100%
It's easy to find others with common interests in Honors	3 2.5%	14 11.9%	13 11.0%	35 29.7%	37 31.4%	16 13.4%	118 100%
I have an intellectual bond with my Honors friends	5 4.3%	13 11.1%	6 5.1%	45 38.5%	40 34.2%	8 6.8%	117 100%
My fellow Honors students know me best	27 23.1%	37 31.6%	30 25.6%	8 6.8%	12 10.3%	3 2.6%	117 100%
It's easy to relate to fellow Honors students about school	7 6.0%	8 6.8%	7 6.0%	33 28.2%	49 41.9%	13 11.1%	117 100%
It's easy to relate to them about other aspects of life	10 8.5%	16 13.7%	20 17.1%	38 32.5%	26 22.2%	7 6.0%	117 100%
I share a lot of interests with friends who are in Honors	7 6.0%	15 12.8%	9 7.7%	44 37.6%	33 28.2%	9 7.7%	117 100%
My fellow Honors students accept me for who I am	4 3.4%	3 2.6%	8 6.8%	38 32.5%	41 35.0%	23 19.7%	117 100%

Group Identification. Group Identification was operationalized using an index ranging from 0 to 10, which consisted of eight survey questions that measured the extent to which participants identify with being an Honors student and identify with the Honors program (see Table #5 for descriptive statistics). The questions utilized for the index were drawn from a study conducted by Heere and James (2007), which effectively measured group identity. The response options for each question were as follows: (0) “Strongly Disagree,” (1) “Disagree,” (2) “Slightly Disagree,” (3) “Slightly Agree,” (4) “Agree,” and (5) “Strongly Agree.”

Table #5: Descriptive Statistics for the Index for Group Identification

Index for Group Identification	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α		
	6.93	7.11	0.67	10	.950		
Indicate your level of agreement...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
I am proud to be called an Honors student	1 0.9%	2 1.7%	5 4.3%	31 26.7%	40 34.5%	37 31.9%	116 100%
I feel good about belonging to the Honors program	1 0.9%	1 0.9%	5 4.3%	34 29.3%	42 36.2%	33 28.4%	116 100%
In general, I'm glad to be a member of Honors	1 0.9%	2 1.7%	5 4.3%	28 24.1%	42 36.2%	38 32.8%	116 100%
I'm proud to think of myself as a member of Honors	1 0.9%	3 2.6%	7 6.0%	32 27.6%	39 33.6%	34 29.3%	116 100%
I think others see Honors students in a positive light	2 1.7%	10 8.6%	15 12.9%	39 33.6%	37 31.9%	13 11.2%	116 100%
I feel others hold Honors students in high esteem	4 3.4%	7 6.0%	23 19.8%	38 32.8%	36 31.0%	8 6.9%	116 100%
Belonging to Honors makes me feel good about myself	4 3.6%	7 6.3%	11 9.9%	35 31.5%	41 36.9%	13 11.7%	111 100%
Being a member of Honors is important to me	4 3.6%	8 7.2%	11 9.9%	27 24.3%	37 33.3%	24 21.6%	111 100%
I feel a strong sense of identity with Honors	6 5.4%	21 18.9%	21 18.9%	24 21.6%	22 19.8%	17 15.3%	111 100%

Positive Experience with Professors. Positive experience with professors was operationalized using an index ranging from 0 to 10, which consisted of seven survey questions that sought to measure the extent to which participants' experiences with professors have been positive (see Table #6 for descriptive statistics). The response options for each question were as follows: (0) "Strongly Disagree," (1) "Disagree," (2) "Slightly Disagree," (3) "Slightly Agree," (4) "Agree," and (5) "Strongly Agree."

Table #6: Descriptive Statistics for the Index for Positive Experience with Professors

Index for Positive Exp. with Professors	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α		
	7.32	1.23	2.57	10	.711		
Indicate your level of agreement...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
My professors care about me as a person	1 1.0%	1 1.0%	5 4.8%	46 44.2%	37 35.6%	14 13.5%	104 100%
My professors want to see me succeed	1 1.0%	1 1.0%	4 3.8%	24 23.1%	55 52.9%	19 18.3%	104 100%
My advisor wants to help me achieve my career objectives	5 4.8%	8 7.7%	9 8.7%	24 23.1%	35 33.7%	23 22.1%	104 100%
My professors work to challenge me	1 1.0%	2 1.9%	3 2.9%	25 24.0%	55 52.9%	18 17.3%	104 100%
My professors have unreasonable expectations	7 6.7%	44 42.3%	29 27.9%	20 19.2%	4 3.8%	0 0%	104 100%
I'm not learning anything relevant to the real world	28 26.9%	39 37.5%	26 25.0%	7 6.7%	3 2.9%	1 1.0%	104 100%
I'm not learning anything for my future career	39 37.5%	42 40.4%	15 14.4%	8 7.7%	0 0%	0 0%	104 100%

Control Variables

Difficulty Paying Attention. Difficulty Paying Attention was operationalized using the survey question, “How often do you have difficulty paying attention in class?” The question produced a non-dichotomous categorical variable with the response options (0) “Never,” (1) “Rarely,” (2) “Sometimes,” (3) “Frequently,” and (4) “Very Frequently,” but was recoded to include only (0) “Infrequently” and (1) “Frequently.” See Table #7 for descriptive statistics.

Race. Race was operationalized using the survey question, “Which category best describes your racial and/or ethnic identity?” The original variable produced contained the response options (0) “Black or African American,” (1) “Hispanic,” (2) “Asian,” (3) “Middle Eastern,” and (4) “White or Caucasian,” but was collapsed to (0) “White” and (1) “Not White” (see Table #7 for descriptive statistics).

Gender. Gender was operationalized using the survey question, “What is your gender?” with response options (0) “Male” and (1) “Female” (see Table #7 for descriptive statistics).

Academic Class. Academic Class was operationalized using the survey question, “What year are you in college?” with response options (0) “Freshman,” (1) “Sophomore,” (2) “Junior,” and (3) “Senior” (see Table #7 for descriptive statistics).

Table #7: Descriptive Statistics for Difficulty Paying Attention, Race, Gender, and Class

	Infrequently	Frequently			Total
Difficulty Paying Attention	99 83.9%	19 16.1%			118 100%
	White	Non-White			Total
Race	97 93.3%	7 6.7%			118 100%
	Male	Female			Total
Gender	43 41.3%	61 58.7%			104 100%
	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Total
Academic Class	46 44.2%	20 19.2%	16 15.4%	22 17.6%	104 100%

Participation. Participation was operationalized using an index ranging from 0 to 4, which consisted of four survey questions that sought to measure the level of involvement in which participants have engaged with Honors by asking participants how often they engage in particular activities pertaining to Honors (see Table #8 for descriptive statistics). The response options were (0) “Never,” (1) “Rarely,” (2) “Sometimes,” (3) “Often,” and (4) “Very Often.”

Table #8: Descriptive Statistics for the Index for Participation

Index for Participation	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α	
Index for Participation	1.94	1.00	0	4	.803	
How often do you...	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Total
Attend scheduled Honors meetings?	42 35.3%	30 25.2%	25 21.0%	14 11.8%	8 6.7%	119 100%
Attend Honors social functions?	32 26.9%	34 28.6%	29 24.4%	14 11.8%	10 8.4%	119 100%
Spend time with Honors peers?	12 10.1%	19 16.0%	37 31.1%	22 18.5%	29 24.4%	119 100%
Read the weekly Honors newsletter?	10 8.4%	12 10.1%	27 22.7%	27 22.7%	43 36.1%	119 100%

High School Performance. High School Performance was operationalized using an index ranging from 0 to 10, which consisted of seven survey questions aimed to measure the participants' academic performance during high school (see Table #9 for descriptive statistics). The response options were (0) "Disagree" and (1) "Agree."

Table #9: Descriptive Statistics for the Index for High School Performance

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α
Index for High School Performance	1.74	0.47	0	2	.823
Indicate your level of agreement...		Disagree	Agree		Total
I always prepared for class		17 16.2%	88 83.8%		105 100%
I was very effective at managing my time		22 21.0%	83 79.0%		105 100%
I had a strong work ethic		14 13.3%	91 86.7%		105 100%
I had high academic standards for myself		9 7.2%	96 91.4%		105 100%
I always got good grades.		8 7.6%	97 92.4%		105 100%
I usually felt like a standout in my classes		10 9.5%	95 90.5%		105 100%
I always took academic work very seriously		16 15.2%	89 84.8%		105 100%

College Preparation. College Preparation was operationalized using an index ranging from 0 to 8, which consisted of eight survey questions aimed at measuring the degree of preparation that went into the participants' transition to college (see Table #10 for descriptive statistics). The response options for each question were (0) "Never," (1) "Rarely," (2) "Sometimes," (3) "Often," and (4) "Very Often."

Table #10: Descriptive Statistics for the Index for College Preparation

Index for College Preparation	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α	
Index for College Preparation	4.32	1.71	0.50	8	.859	
How often did you...	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Total
Search for colleges online?	14 13.3%	20 19.0%	29 27.6%	26 24.8%	16 15.2%	105 100%
Talk with teachers or counselors about college?	21 20.0%	30 28.6%	25 23.8%	15 14.3%	14 13.3%	105 100%
Visit colleges or universities?	8 7.6%	35 33.3%	40 38.1%	14 13.3%	8 7.6%	105 100%
Talk with college or university recruiters?	27 25.7%	33 31.4%	25 23.8%	13 12.4%	7 6.7%	105 100%
Plan for the academic challenges of college?	14 13.3%	17 16.2%	24 22.9%	30 28.6%	20 19.0%	105 100%
Talk with parents or guardians about challenges of college?	11 10.5%	11 10.5%	29 27.6%	34 32.4%	20 19.0%	105 100%
Talk with your friends about your aspirations?	8 7.6%	8 7.6%	21 20.0%	33 31.4%	35 33.3%	105 100%
Talk with your family about your aspirations?	2 1.9%	11 10.5%	23 21.9%	33 31.4%	36 34.3%	105 100%

Findings

Based upon the results of a multivariate linear regression, just under 50% (Adj. $R^2=.493$) of the variance in academic performance is explained by the independent variables in the model ($F=8.148$; $p<.001$). First, consistent with hypothesis #1, with every one point increase in one's level of self-esteem, there is an increase of about .13 ($b=.129$) in the level of academic performance ($t=2.063$; $p<.05$). Whereas those with the mean level of self-esteem of about 6.2 ($m=6.187$) have an average level of academic performance of 7.83, those with a level of self-esteem of 10 have an average level of academic performance of 8.32. Second, contrary to hypothesis #2 and #3, statistically significant relationships were neither found between level of academic performance and living in Honors housing nor between level of academic performance and strength of the sense of community. However, consistent with hypothesis #4, with every one point increase in the strength of group identification with Honors, there is an increase of about .18 ($b=.177$) in the level of academic performance ($t=2.236$; $p<.05$). Whereas those with a group identification with honors of the mean ($m=6.933$) have an average academic performance level of 7.83, those with a group identification with Honors of 10 have an average academic performance level of 8.37. Finally, consistent with hypothesis #5, with every one unit increase in the level of positive experience with professors, academic performance increases by about .32 ($b=.322$; $t=2.989$; $p<.001$). Whereas those with a score of the mean value ($m=7.324$) on the positive experience with professors index have an average academic performance level of 7.83, those with a 10 on the positive experience with professors index have an average academic performance level of 8.69.

Along with the findings associated with the hypotheses, two control variables, high school performance and difficulty paying attention, proved to be significantly related to academic performance. With every one unit increase in the level of high school performance, an increase of .238 ($b=.238$) in the level of academic performance was shown ($t=4.465$; $p<.001$). Whereas those with the mean level of high school performance

($m=8.694$) have an average academic performance level of 7.83, those with a high school performance level of 10 have an average academic performance level of 8.14.

Difficulty paying attention was negatively correlated with academic performance. Those who often have difficulty paying attention in class have an average level of academic performance nearly one point lower ($b=-.964$) than those who do not often have difficulty paying attention in class ($t=-2.887$; $p<.01$). Whereas those who do not often have difficulty paying attention have an average academic performance level of 7.98, those who do often have difficulty paying attention have an average level of academic performance of 7.02.

Table #11: Linear Regression Analysis of Selected Independent Variables on Academic Performance

	B (S.E.)
Self-Esteem	.129* (.063)
Honors Housing	-.325 (.240)
Sense of Community	-.141 (.089)
Group ID	.177* (.079)
Positive Experience with Professors	.322** (.108)
<i>Control Variables</i>	
Participation	.031 (.168)
High School Performance	.238*** (.053)
College Preparation	.067 (.074)
Difficulty Paying Attention	-.964** (.334)
Non-White	-.013 (.469)
Female	.392 (.264)
Class (Freshmen)	
Sophomore	.278 (.305)
Junior	.414 (.347)
Senior	.241 (.325)
Constant	1.750* (.849)
F-Ratio	8.148
Adjusted r^2	.493

Note: * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

Discussion

Self-Esteem

The relationship between self-esteem and academic performance is likely reciprocal in nature. Although self-esteem was shown here to influence change in academic performance, the opposite is likely true as well. As high-achievers, it is altogether likely that Honors students allow their academic performance to shape their self-perceptions and, in turn, they may allow their self-perceptions to shape their assessments of their own performance. Moreover, they may be subject to losses in self-esteem translating to decreased performance in their studies. In this sense, the relationship takes on a reciprocal configuration and, perhaps, the relationship may be cyclical. If this is the case, Honors students would be at heightened risk of large drops in self-esteem as a result of any academic struggles. Similarly, they would be at heightened risk of suffering problems with academic performance as a result of diminished self-esteem. Future research on Honors students should seek to further understand the nature of the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance, specifically to determine directionality.

Honors Housing and Sense of Community

As academically oriented individuals, Honors students may place very little emphasis on place while school is in session, which is consistent with the findings of Stewart (1980). That is, assuming that Honors students are especially keen on performing well in their studies, the result is an emphasis on knowledge acquisition, synthesis of intellectual ideals and arguments as they relate to course assignments, and exam preparation. According to the findings, it is a likely explanation that place is not of particular importance to Honors students, suggesting that their efforts to attend to their schoolwork is not made more or less successful by their living environment. Furthermore, it is possible that Honors students spend very little time in their residence halls and are instead spending a great deal of time away from their rooms in academic buildings

like libraries or major department buildings. Future research should include the amount of time actually spent in one's room in order to account for it as a mediating factor.

The same reasoning would apply to the impact of Honors students' sense of community within Honors on academic performance. Similar to their apparent lack of preference in living arrangement, the findings suggest Honors students are able to separate academic life from social life. For better or for worse, an Honors student's sense of community within Honors does not appear to be linked to the level of performance they demonstrate in their school work. This could come as a result of an inherent or developed ability to compartmentalize these aspects of their lives.

However, the findings do not necessarily suggest that one's sense of community is entirely unrelated to academic performance. Rather, the findings only suggest that one's experience of a sense of community within Honors does not significantly impact one's academic performance relative to one who does not experience a sense of community within Honors. This claim of no relationship is limited in scope, and it does not rule out sense of community as being associated with academic performance. It is still possible that students who do not experience a sense of community in Honors experience a sense of community in other groups or organizations and that this is having an effect on academic performance. That is, a sense of community within any group or organization may still be related to academic performance, but the scope of the study did not make available enough data to determine whether or not this is the case. Consequently, future research should aim to reach a clearer conclusion on this point.

Group Identification

As the strength of one's identification with a group increases, the more one is likely to frame a particular set of behaviors and characteristics associated with membership in that group based on what is gathered from observation of other members and interaction with those members. That collection of behaviors becomes a role that one internalizes as a standard of performance for the given identity. For Honors students, the set of behaviors most associated with membership in Honors is high academic achievement. Given this expectation, it is no surprise that those with higher levels of identification with Honors exhibit higher levels of academic performance. A standard of role performance exists that is associated with one's identity as an Honors student and, the more internalized that standard becomes, the more it will make itself apparent in one's behaviors. For Honors students, a strong identification with Honors would likely result in a higher frequency of and commitment to behaviors associ-

ated with academic success like reading assigned course materials, observing submission deadlines, attending class, and visiting professors.

Positive Experience with Professors

Positive experiences with professors may include a student's feeling that their professors genuinely wants to see them succeed, that the student feels they are learning thing that are relevant to their careers and life in general, and that their professor does not have unreasonable expectations. These conditions likely produce a dynamic in which a student is far more willing to double down in their efforts to succeed in the professor's corresponding courses. A feeling of respect for the professor would likely result in habits that are intended to make the professor see the student in a favorable light, such as attending all classes, coming to classes having completed assigned readings, and actively engaging in class discussion.

Professors are also often known for playing instrumental roles in forging the career paths of their students. Students who have strongly positive experiences with professors may desire to allow that professor to be a mentor to them. When students have faculty mentors, these faculty members are able to provide a wealth of experience in their respective major fields as well as valuable advice about how to approach future decisions and future courses. These relationships may make students who take part in them better prepared to succeed in their major fields, thereby improving their academic performance.

High School Performance

The finding that high school performance is positively related to academic performance in college suggests that there is, in at least a general sense, continuity in the behaviors and habits of students as they progress in their education. That is, students who frequently miss classes, miss deadlines, and fail to read course materials in high school are likely to continue with a similar pattern of behaviors in college. Conversely, students who have developed adaptive academic habits in high school are likely to apply a similar attitude to academic work in college. In the case of Honors students, the effect that group identity has on academic performance raises an interesting question about the transition from high school to college. Enough evidence in the findings suggests that group identity with Honors could intervene with students who were not particularly high-achievers in high school and might serve to direct those students' behaviors in a direction that emphasizes academic success. Again, the adoption of an identity as an Honors student carries with it associated roles and behavioral expectations. Future research

should seek to further explore the effect that group identity has on students transitioning from high school to college. If identifying with an Honors program has a positive effect on academic performance, it may not necessarily be the case that behavioral continuity from high school to college is a certainty, given that the degree to which a student adopts the role of an Honors student may have more predictive power over academic performance than performance in high school.

Difficulty Paying Attention

Not surprisingly, a difficulty paying attention in class on a frequent basis proved to be a hindrance to academic performance. The measures in this study did not seek to capture what the various causes were for a difficulty to pay attention, but they would likely include willful distractions like social media and text messaging, involuntary distractions like problems in the family or relationship struggles, a lack of interest in course material, a particularly dry personality delivering lectures, lack of sleep, stress, and many other potential contributors to difficulty in paying attention. Much of the knowledge acquisition that takes place in a college setting occurs in the classroom itself. It is during these regular course meetings that the material presented in assigned readings is discussed by the professor in a way that makes the material more comprehensible to the student. In addition, it is also in this setting that classroom discussion takes place, allowing students to ask questions in order to obtain clarity on any section of the course material that is still vexing to them. For students that have difficulty paying attention in class, this enlightening benefit of class attendance is lost on them. When the possibility that the same student did not read the course materials before attending is considered, the chances of them coming away from the class with a passing understanding of the material are slim.

Conclusion

It is clear upon reflection of the findings that one's social reality has a measurable impact on academic performance. Particularly interesting are the findings regarding group identification and positive experience with professors. These aspects of the social lives of Honors students shape the reality in which they perceive themselves to be situated and inform the attitudes that Honors students adopt toward academic work. The evidence provided by this study points to the conclusion that an Honors student's construction of self drives that student's behaviors as they relate to academic work.

This study was limited in its scope to Honors students, which makes generalizing the theoretical conclusions of the findings be-

yond that of Honors students alone difficult. However, a very tentative, preliminary claim could be made that group identification with a myriad of different groups, not just Honors, may potentially impact academic performance. Based on the argument that behaviors are shaped by the extent to which an individual identifies with a group, any groups that are associated with particularly adaptive or maladaptive academic behaviors are likely to influence the academic performance of those who identify with them. Furthermore, with regard to positive experiences with professors, there is not any readily available reason that the effect seen in this study is exclusive to Honors students. Future research on this topic should seek to determine whether or not these findings can be generalized to a broader population.

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Prescription Pain Reliever Misuse: An Explanatory Study of the Social Factors Contributing to Prescription Pain Reliever Misuse

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The opioid epidemic as a social problem has increasingly received more attention from the mass media as well as the scientific community. Despite all this attention substance use disorders involving prescription pain relievers affect roughly 1.9 million Americans annually. **Aims:** The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of mental health and risky behaviors such as alcohol use on propensity for non-medical prescription pain reliever use. **Design & Methods:** The data for this study came from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. A multivariate logistic regression analysis was run on a number of variables pulled from the survey. **Results:** The study showed that certain mental conditions and risky behaviors increase one's propensity for non-medical prescription pain reliever use. **Discussion:** The findings of the study suggest (1) future research is necessary to understand further the correlations among mental health, risky behavior, and non-medical prescription pain reliever use; (2) that greater attention by all stakeholders to one's mental health history is a significant factor in affecting the aforementioned epidemic; and (3) that greater attention to individual willingness to participate risky behavior (e.g., frequent alcohol consumption) could significantly impact the epidemic. **Conclusion:** The findings in this study can potentially assist healthcare providers in safer prescribing practices as well as other practical applications. With a broader knowledge of conditions correlated to the use of prescription pain relievers for non-medical reasons, the medical community could engage in safer prescribing of this potent medication.

Introduction

The U.S. has seen a steady increase in prescription drug abuse since the mid-1990's [1]. The aggressive treatment of pain as a chronic incurable condition has led to a large influx in availability of prescription drugs [2]. The U.S. alone accounts for 80% of the world's opioid supply and 99% of the world's hydrocodone supply [3]. This epidemic cost insurers 72.5 billion dollars in 2007 [4]. Though the problem of prescription drug abuse is not new to this country, the severity of the problem has reached new proportions [5].

Along with this influx, a gap has developed in understanding what conditions correlate with the use of prescription pain relievers for the purpose of getting high. The abuse of this supply of pain reliever medication demands the attention of the scientific community; a need exists to further understand some of the behaviors and mental conditions that contribute to prescription pain reliever misuse. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of depression, mental distress, and social anxiety as well as alcohol consumption on the likelihood of using opioids non-medically in hopes of providing a greater understanding of this epidemic.

Literature Review

Periods of Depression & Opioid Use

With substance use disorder being at the heart of the opioid epidemic [4] it is important to understand certain traits an individual may possess that make him or her more susceptible to non-medical prescription pain reliever use. Mood disorders such as depression often go hand in hand with non-medical prescription opioid use [6]. Studies have shown that individuals who take higher dosages of pain medication also report periods of depression more frequently than those who are taking a lower dose [7,8].

Those who report depression are at a much higher risk of long term pain reliever misuse [7,9]. In many cases individuals that have never experienced any form of substance use in the past report pain reliever abuse to alleviate depressive symptoms [10]. Those that may have initially received their prescription for the purpose of treating acute pain are in turn far more inclined to take these opioids to treat the mental pain of their depressive symptoms [10].

The consumption of these opioids in order to relieve mental pain provides a paradox of sorts for the user, being that the depressive symptoms often worsen as the frequency of self-medication increases [8,9]. The user becomes dependent upon the opioids physically as well as mentally, which in turn can intensify the initial depressive symptoms [11]. Being that drug misuse is already signifi-

cantly higher in individuals who report depression [12], I propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Individuals who experience periods of depression are more likely to use prescription pain relievers non-medically than those who do not experience periods of depression.

Mental Distress & Opioid Use

Mental distress can manifest itself through a variety of psychiatric conditions such as suicidal ideations and manic depressive episodes [13]. These conditions in turn can also be linked to a highly-elevated risk of drug misuse [6,7,10,12,14]. Those who report a high level of mental distress in their life often characterized by feelings of hopelessness, restless nights and low self-worth, are much more susceptible to develop substance use disorders [15].

A recent study on suicidality and non-medical prescription drug misuse found that those who displayed symptoms such as feelings of hopelessness and low self-worth showed some of the strongest correlations in non-medical prescription drug misuse [16]. The increased level of dopamine this opioid medication provides and the subsequent euphoric experience serves to kill some of the mental pain which accompanies this level of distress [17]. The medication can provide relief from intense feelings of hopelessness and provide one with an acceptance of their environment that was not previously attainable in their mental state [17]. Accordingly, I hypothesize the following:

H2: Those who experience frequent mental distress in their lives are more likely to use prescription pain relievers non-medically than those who do not experience frequent mental distress in their lives.

Social Anxiety and Prescription Pain Reliever Misuse:

Social anxiety disorder, i.e., an inability to perform daily tasks within one's social setting such as small talk with strangers, commonly correlates with substance use [18-20]. It often goes hand in hand with depressive episodes and can be linked to a variety of other forms of mental illness [21]. Pharmacotherapy is often utilized in the medical community as a treatment for social anxiety disorder, so it is easy to understand how an individual may experience relief via self-administered opioid medication [21]. Though the medications administered for this condition are not entirely similar in their effects they are each associated with higher concentrations of dopamine in the brain and are similar in this regard [21-23].

Prescription drug abuse being somewhat easy to conceal as opposed to other substances becomes a prime method of escape for individuals who experience emotional unrest in social settings [24]. These effects allow one's social environment to become much more acceptable and tolerable whereas prior to the pain reliever use the individual found their social duties almost impossible to carry out. Falling in line with what is stated above an inability to connect with one's social environment can lead to feelings of low self-worth and other forms of more serious mental distress which in turn makes one more susceptible to prescription pain reliever misuse [6,15]. It was based upon this research that I proposed the following hypothesis:

H3: Those who experience social anxiety are more likely to use prescription pain relievers non-medically than those who do not experience social anxiety.

Alcohol Use & Prescription Opioids

Periods of depression and other mental health conditions have demonstrated a positive correlation with a propensity for alcohol use [25]. Research also shows that individuals who use alcohol are more likely to abuse other substances one study showed a 57% prevalence of former alcohol use in young adults who report prescription pain reliever abuse [26,27]. Given these correlations it is important to consider the sequence in which one can often begin with alcohol use and graduate on to non-medical use of prescription pain relievers as it may better develop and widen the understanding of this complex epidemic [28].

Alcohol use is a rather socially accepted and well integrated aspect of our society [29]. One may find a social drink to be quite a relief yet refrain from using the substance addictively due to its effects which are rather hard to conceal, i.e. smell, slurred speech, loss of balance and things of this nature. A prescription drug however, when introduced to this individual, can be quite appealing in that it is easier to conceal, at least initially, and provides the same relief. Recent studies have in fact shown a link between alcohol consumption specifically and a propensity for non-medical use of prescription drugs [30-34]. Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis:

H4: As the frequency of daily alcohol consumption per week increases, the likelihood of using non-medical prescription pain relievers increases.

Research Design

Data & Ethics

The data for this study came from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services which primarily measures the prevalence and correlates of drug use in the United States [35]. The study was conducted using the CAI method (computer assisted personal interviewing), and it covered individuals aged 12 and older (N=67,838). However, for the purpose of this study, the sample was reduced to people who were at least 18 years old (N=54,959).

The researchers conducting the secondary data analysis maintained the highest ethical standards. The dataset analyzed is available to the general public and does not have present any identifying information about any participants. Moreover, the SAMHSA maintained the highest ethical standards in the initial collection of the data [35].

Measures

The dependent variable used throughout this study was non-medical prescription pain reliever use (See Table #1). The variable was based upon the following survey question: "Have you ever, even once, used any type of prescription pain reliever that was not prescribed to you or that you took for the experience or feeling it caused" (coded "Yes" = 1, "No"=0).

The independent variables utilized fell under the categories of "Mental Health", "Adult Depression", and "Alcohol." First, depression was measured using the survey question, "In the last thirty days have you experienced periods of depression lasting several days or longer" (0= "No" and 1="Yes"). Second, mental distress was operationalized by the survey question, "In the last 30 days how frequently have you experienced thoughts of hopelessness." The response options were; (1) "All of the time," (2) "Most of the time," (3) "Some of the time," (4) "A little of the time," and (5) "None of the time," but it was recoded as (0) "Never" ("None of the Time") (1) = "Sometimes" ("Some of the time" and "A little of the time"), and (2) "Often" ("All of the time" and "Most of the time"). Third, social anxiety was operationalized by the survey question, "In the last thirty days how much difficulty have you had talking to strangers?" The questions response options were (1) "No difficulty," (2) "Mild difficulty," (3) "Moderate difficulty," (4) "Severe Difficulty," and (5) "Did Not Participate," but it was recoded as (0)

“No Difficulty”, (1) “Some Difficulty” (“Mild Difficulty” and “Moderate Difficulty”), (2) “Severe Difficulty,” and (3) “Did Not Participate.” Finally, alcohol consumption was measured using the survey question, “On average, how many days did you drink an alcoholic beverage each week during the past 12 months.” The response options ranged from 0 to 7. Initially the survey question only dealt with individuals who reported drinking, and essentially excluded those who did not drink assigning it a value (99). For the purpose of this study, however, the value of (99) was recoded to be (0), in order to account for individuals who reported not drinking at all.

The control variables in this study were age, education, income, and gender. The variables age and income were initially scale variables that were recoded into categorical variables. Initially age included those aged 12-17 years old however for this study these values were excluded and only those aged 18 or older were considered. The final coding for age was as follows; (0) 18-25, (1) 26-34, (2) 35 and older. The finally coding for income was as follows; (0) less than 20,000, (1) 20,000-49,999, (2) 50,000-74,999, (3) 75,000 or more. The variable of education was a categorical variable initially containing 11 response options which were as follows; (1) “5th grade or less,” (2) “6th grade,” (3) “7th grade,” (4) “8th grade,” (5) “9th grade,” (6) “10th grade,” (7) “11th grade,” (8) “12th grade,” (9) “Freshman/13th year,” (10) “Sophomore/ 14th year or Junior/ 15th year,”(11) “Senior /16th year or Grad/Prof School.” The response options 1-7 were recoded (0) “Less Than High school;” response option 8 was recoded as (1) “High School Graduate;” response options 9 and 10 were recoded as (2) “Some College;” and response option 11 was recoded as (3) “College Graduate.” Gender was coded as (0) “Male” and (1) “Female.”

Table #1: Descriptive Statistics

	No	Yes			Total
	N (% valid)	N (% Valid)			N/100%
Non-Med. P.R. Use	8,094 (14.7)	46,865 (85.3)			54,959
	No	Yes			Total
	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)			N/100%
Depressed	25,160 (67.5)	12,088 (32.5)			37,248
	Male	Female			Total
	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)			N/100%
Female	26,331 (47.7)	28,829(52.3)			55,160
	Never	Not Often	Often		
	N(% Valid)	N(% Valid)	N(% Valid)	Total	
Hopelessness	24,322(65.3)	11,139 (29.9)	1,778 (4.8)	37,239	
	18-25	26-34	35 & Older	Total	
	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)	N/100%	
Age	18,142(48.5)	5,446(14.6)	13,836(37.0)	37,424	
	No Difficulty	Some Difficulty	Severe Difficulty	Did Not Participate	Total
	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)	N/100%
Social Anxiety	17,932 (59.5)	9,862(32.7)	1,374(4.6)	964 (3.2)	30,123
	< H.S.	High School	Some College	College Graduate	Total
	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)	N/100%
Education	5,705(15.2)	11,869(31.7)	11,380(30.4)	8,470(22.6)	37,424
	< 20k	20k – 49k	50k -74k	75k or more	Total
	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)	N (% Valid)	N/100%
Income	13,048 (23.7)	17,841(32.3)	8,861(16.1)	15,410(27.9)	55,160
	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Alcohol, Weekly	1.07	1.71	0	7	27,506

Findings

Out of 54,900 respondents about 85% (85.3%) stated they had never used prescription pain relievers non-medically while about 15% (14.7%) stated that they did use prescription pain relievers non-medically. According to the binary multivariate logistic regression analysis about 17% (Nagelkerke $r^2= 0.17$) of the variance in non-medical prescription pain reliever use can be explained by periods of depression, mental distress, social anxiety, and alcohol consumption (Model $\chi^2= 1285.56$; $p<0.001$). First, consistent with H1, those who are depressed are about 60% more likely to use prescription pain relievers for non- medical reasons than those who do not report frequent periods of depression (Exp[β]= 1.61; $p<0.001$). Second, consistent with H2, those who experience mental distress often are about 58% more likely to report the use of prescription pain relievers for non-medical reasons than those who do not (Exp[β]= 1.58; $p<0.001$).

Consistent with H3 those who experience social anxiety are about 67% more likely to report non-medical prescription pain reliever misuse than those who do not experience social anxiety (Exp[β]= 1.67; $p<0.001$). Consistent with H4, as number of days per week that one reports consuming alcohol increases, the likelihood of reporting non-medical prescription pain reliever use increases by about 40% (Exp[β]= 1.40; $p<0.001$).

Regarding the control variables, although the findings regarding gender was consistent with previous research, the findings related to age, education, and income were surprising. Specifically, women were just over 27% less likely than men to use prescription pain relievers for non-medical purposes (Exp[β]=0.73; $p<0.001$). People between the ages of 26 and 34 are just over 19% more likely to use prescription pain relievers for non-medical purposes than people between the ages of 18 and 25 (Exp[β]=1.19; $p<0.05$); however, people who are 35 years old or older were over 50% less likely to use prescription pain relievers for non-medical purposes than those between the ages of 18 and 25 (Exp[β]=0.49; $p<0.001$). Moreover, people with a college degree had the only statistically significant difference in the use of prescription pain relievers for non-medical purposes than those with less than a high school degree. Interestingly, people with a college degree were just over 17% less likely to use prescription pain relievers for non-medical purposes than people with less than a high school degree (Exp[β]=0.83; $p<0.05$). Income, however, was surprisingly statistically insignificant.

Table #2: A Multivariate Logistic Regression Analysis of The Impact of The Independent Variables on The Likelihood of Non-Medical Prescription Pain Reliever Use.

	B(S.E.)	Exp(B)	95% C.I.
Periods of Depression	0.47***(.05)	1.61	1.44, 1.79
Sense of hopelessness (Never)			
Not Often	0.20*** (0.06)	1.22	1.10, 1.36
Often	0.46 ***(.10)	1.58	1.29,1.93
Social Anxiety (No Difficulty)			
Some Difficulty	0.37*** (0.06)	1.45	1.30, 1.61
Severe Difficulty	0.51 ***(.12)	1.57	1.33, 2.10
Did Not Participate	0.28 (0.15)	1.32	0.99, 1.75
Weekly Alcohol Consumption	0.33 ***(.01)	1.40	1.36, 1.43
Age (18-25)			
26-34	0.18* (0.07)	1.19	1.04, 1.36
35 and older	-0.71*** (0.06)	0.49	0.44, 0.56
Education (Less Than High School)			
HS Graduate	-0.03 (0.08)	0.97	0.83, 1.14
Some College	0.03 (0.08)	1.03	0.88, 1.21
College Graduate	-0.19* (0.09)	0.83	0.70, 0.98
Income (Less Than 20,000)			
20,000-49,999	-0.013(0.07)	0.99	0.87, 1.12
50,000-74,999	-0.03 (0.08)	0.97	0.83, 1.13
75,000 or more	-0.12 (0.07)	0.88	0.77, 1.02
Female	-0.32*** (0.05)	0.73	0.66, 0.80
Constant		-2.20*** (0.09)	
Model χ^2		1285.56***	
Nagelkerke r^2		.166	

* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

Discussion

This study sought to examine non-medical prescription pain reliever use, alcohol consumption, mental health, and the correlations that exist between these variables. The findings indicate that indeed certain risky behaviors and mental health conditions correlate directly with a propensity for non-medical prescription pain reliever use. The findings in this study can potentially assist healthcare providers in safer prescribing practices as well as other practical applications. With a broader knowledge of conditions that correlate with the use of prescription pain relievers for non-medical reasons the medical community can engage in safer prescribing of this exceptionally potent medication.

The findings of the analysis relating to non-medical prescription pain reliever misuse, periods of depression (H1), mental distress (H2), and social anxiety (H3) support previous research which shows comorbidity between common mental health diagnosis and prescription pain reliever use [9,36]. The analysis shows a very significant increase in propensity for non-medical prescription pain reliever misuse and periods of depression as well as frequency of mental distress and social anxiety. This increased propensity could be linked to a theory known as “chemical disassociation”, a chemically induced form of psychogenic disassociation [37]. The individual, as a result of his or her mental illness, finds reality impossible to endure and thus seeks relief via “chemical disassociation” or self-medication [38-40].

The relief this medication provides unfortunately becomes contraindicative after a certain period of time, in that the initial mental pain in which it originally served to numb comes back in greater degree [41]. The mental pain that the medication was intended to reduce is only eased for a period of time, after the medication wears off the individual is met with the previous pain as well as the pain of his or her actions such as; guilt, remorse, and shame. The cycle of this pain can in turn foster dependence as the individual requires more medication each time to reduce the level of pain he or she feels.

The significant correlation in these findings can be helpful to providers in the healthcare community (i.e. counselors, primary care physicians, specialists) as well as any party who has a potential influence on the individuals use of prescription pain relievers (friends and loved ones i.e. social circle). Particularly of interest to the individuals in one’s social circle are the findings related to H4 which found that as alcohol consumption increased individual’s propensity for the use of prescription pain-relievers for non-medical reasons increased significantly. Alcohol consumption being more widely accepted as a social adhesive in many situations can serve to demon-

strate the level of risk that one may have to abuse pain relievers which may have initially been prescribed for medical reasons.

Rather serendipitous findings, however, were the insignificance of income and the particular significance of age and education. First, the findings demonstrate that the prescription drug epidemic has its impact on the individual regardless of socio-economic status, and that, contrary to commonsense notions, drug abuse is not exclusive to certain income brackets. Second, those who are between the ages of 26 and 34 were of a significantly higher risk to abuse prescription pain relievers than those who were between the ages of 18 and 25. These findings invoke deeper thought in that this age bracket would typically be considered to be in their “prime.” One’s body is generally considered to be in excellent shape at this time and often recovers quickly from any accrued injuries. This claim is not substantiated however due to the findings that they seem to be suffering the most from a propensity to abuse prescription pain relievers. Finally, those who reported having a college degree did demonstrate a less significant propensity for non-medical prescription pain reliever use than those who reported simply a high school education.

Limitations

The dataset used in this study is statistically representative of the U.S. adult population however it had a few substantive and operational limitations. The variable of depression in H1 was dichotomous (1) “yes” (0) “no” which did not allow for a clear understanding of the severity of depression one experienced. Though the variables for H2 and H3 are linked directly to the operationalized definitions in the hypothesis they are not the sole characteristics of said conditions. This allows for some limitations on understanding the impact of independent variables in H2 and H3 on the dependent variable. In future research scholars, could potentially expand each hypothesis into more variables associated with each condition essentially providing a single, more in-depth, study per hypothesis. The control variables also invoke the need for greater research on social factors that influence this epidemic, this study only briefly discusses these factors as they were not the primary focus of the research.

Conclusions

Prescription drug abuse has reached epidemic proportions nationwide. The findings of this study further reinforce the notion that substance abuse correlates directly with mental health as well as risky behaviors. The connection that this study makes between mental health, risky behavior and propensity for non-medical prescrip-

tion pain reliever use will hopefully inspire scholars to further examine this devastating social problem and its correlating conditions. The research in this study only addressed a small piece of the complex issue of prescription pain reliever abuse in America. Given these findings however and the impact which this epidemic has already had on the American people it is my hope that this study will beckon scholars of the scientific community to expedite further research on this issue.

Acknowledgements

The view expressed in this manuscript are exclusively those of the authors; they do not reflect the views of the SAMHSA, who originally collected the data. No conflicts of interest exist.

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Student Attitudes Toward Learning in Post-Secondary Education: Making Learning Fun Again

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ABSTRACT

This study qualitatively explored the specific contexts encompassing the college learning environment, in order to better understand student attitudes towards learning in post-secondary education. For far too long, stagnant standards have continued to be in play in regards to what is typical of college classroom settings, the styles of teaching that are often used, and the inner-workings of the student-to-teacher dynamic. A primary objective of this study is to discover and properly utilize students' current attitudes, in application, to better allow for an overall heightened learning experience in which students find learning fun and engaging. This study used approximately 10 college-university students (8 female and 2 male), ages 19 to 30 (mean age 23), who were either currently enrolled or had recently graduated, and were interviewed via a semi-structured interview protocol. Additionally, two separate observational periods took place that aided in documenting examples of the current styles of teaching within the overall classroom dynamic. Interview responses and observation records were later assessed and coded in order to observe if any patterns or predominant themes were repetitive, across both situations that were observed in this study. Guiding research questions and the results are discussed, as well as implications for future research and limitations pertaining to this study. Lastly, all observed themes from the interviews and observations performed are sufficiently grounded in theory, utilizing the framework Integrative-Exchange theory, to better allow for the visualization of real-world applicability from both a micro and macro level of analysis.

I was barely even four years old, and I remember how badly I used to pester my mother about wanting to go to school, for reasons unknown to me at that time. I always had this deep burning sense of desire to learn, and I mean learn everything! Of course, because of this my mother always referred to me as the “living sponge” because I could quite literally pick up anything I learned very quickly, always remaining with the dire thirst for more. For example, I learned algebra one summer, just for fun, from my babysitter when I was still a meager second grader, and I was so proud of myself that I knew how to spell a hard word like “hippopotamus” at just five or six years old. As some might call it, those were the good days, very good days indeed.

Those were the days when learning was something that one looked forward to because it meant utilizing the imagination and your unique creativity to put your own personal spin on projects and papers. Anything was possible, the sea was your oyster in terms of not having pre-set limits on how big and incredibly crazy your ideas could actually be. We were engaged and locked into the seemingly limitless possibilities that we could gander and tweak, usually something that would literally blow the teachers mind! However, something seems to happen along the way, learning becomes more difficult and less creative; beginning to amount to hours spent critically thinking about an assignment that just doesn't quite offer that “creative spark” that it once did. Young students whom often looked forward to utilizing their imaginations to the upmost of its capability, now however, as adults never once hear a genuine request from an educator that entails tapping into the abundance that is ones' imagination. Thus students' unique creativity eventually morphs into nothingness; the imagination becomes something that just gets stored away in some hallway closet with the old winter coats, often left unused and forever forgotten about indefinitely.

However, this does not necessarily need to be the case according to some of the more recent findings existing within the relevant literature. For instance, Billings and Halstead (2005) have shown much success when exploring this idea by utilizing games and/or gaming within the classroom setting. Gaming has been repeatedly shown to be enjoyable by everyone at any age in many differing context. In addition, using games for learning is significantly related to many other positive outcomes, such as: 1.) facilitating an increased learner participation, 2.) observed increases in student motivation, coupled with similar accelerations in goal-oriented behaviors, 3.) the increased retention-and-recall of important material currently being learned in the classroom via the actual gaming experience itself. These findings alone provide us with some very important and interesting insight regarding both its use and application, both

in theory and in applied practice. One example supported by the literature goes further to illustrate that we can indeed make learning more fun and engaging, and thus was later observed in the real-world within a class of approximately 60 junior nursing students. Their nursing instructor took advantage of some of the benefits that gaming offers in the actual classroom-setting, and later found that it had contributed to the improvement of student memory and overall knowledge retention-and-recall during relevant memory tasks. This method ‘specifically’ went on to being documented and subsequently published at a later date, serving as a goal-and-means by which to share with others while continuing to bask in its gross benefits (Horsley 2010).

The underlying theme directing this particular nursing game was similar to that of Family Feud and Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, but rather this particular game was an abundant combination and a much more synergistic piece, that also integrated Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation Software to create multiple slides that would display several multiple-choice questions in articulate order. Therefore, student-participants were free to compete against one another in providing the correct answers in a timely matter that ensured they answered well before their competing classmates stood any slim chance. The game creator ensured that all students were included and/or were participants throughout every stage and position within the game, be it contestants, host, public crowd, etc. The teaching faculty member was present only to observe that the game moved along as it should and to provide expertise if any answers were challenged strictly on an as-need-basis.

Moving forward, it is crucial to draw the proper attention towards a separate but very prominently-problematic vein in which students' personal lives are isolated from their lives of education and work. Past and current literature combined goes on to illustrate a centuries old problem in terms of ‘the divide’ that exists within educational institutions far and wide, a divide between being able to have fun and that of being tied quiet and restricted; a divide that not only exists, but has continued to grow increasingly since first acknowledged many years ago. The Dean of Students at the University of Minnesota, E.G. Williamson (1957) appears to be one of the first individuals to properly shed light on just how large this divide is existing between our work and education domains are, in comparison with our home and personal life domains, during a speech provided the Student Leaders of Campus Activities. Williamson went on to define the life of the typical college student as encompassing embarrassment and inconsistency, in which their study had become nothing but an interference that beckoned upon their overall life-domains. Upon identifying key concerns about this issue, he later

suggested a means to remedy the divide and thus create an adequate 'bridge' of sorts, one in which fun and engaging-enjoyable experiences would also abridge into 'ones' inside work/and/education-spheres', rather than occurring only largely within ones 'outside personal life-sphere'. Seemingly enough, several individual attempts have been made through the years since the divide was first identified, and while the foundation of knowledge pertaining to this has only continued to grow considerably since, nothing of any real substance has been put into application (Merriam and Caffarella 1999; Glendon and Ulrich 2005). One might even describe the scenario as a situation in which there has been all talk and no play in this regard, whether it was just a means to an end; continuing through the years building more and more support but never truly vested in making any real change with the findings that have amassed.

One critical factor to consider when trying to rationalize or reason why nothing has been put into motion to enforce any actual change within the educational domain, may be more properly explained by the strict argument observed within some of the Sociological literature. Some of this literature acknowledges a prior support for a Pedagogy implicating that individuals themselves (e.g. the actual student learner) does not contain the needed skills or necessary knowledge prior to their actual continued attendance within an educational institution. Therefore, they cannot possibly contribute to their own learning process of any real substance or material, when discussing implementing policy changes that would allow for the integration of the student voice and have a say in their own learning experience and future (Horsley 2010). According to Knowles Adult Education theory, Pedagogy seemed to be the primary influence upon education up until sometime around the 1950's. The term 'Pedagogy' defined teachers as the all-knowing, while defining students with no real capability to assist, thus students are passive bystanders in their learning process. However, Knowles noted that adults over the age of eighteen are unlike children in vastly regarded-different ways, mainly because they bring with them prior learning and life experience when entering a classroom. Thus, if students are equipped with this prior knowledge and life experience, then it is only logical to implement teachers as 'facilitators' who empower students during their learning experience, rather than participating forcibly in ways in which they create barriers to any real learning experience taking place (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson 2005). Ever since this was uncovered, the Pedagogy approach was later shelved and traded places with a newer approach called 'Andragogy'. Andragogy has since illustrated that it applies attributions to adult learners as a means to qualify that they do, indeed,

possess critically important prior life experiences and/or knowledge, therefore, adult students actually can contribute to their own overall learning processes.

Therefore, it is the goal of the current study to identify with today's college students in the attempt to enable a more precise and clear understanding pertaining to how they feel in terms of their current college experience and their learning trajectories overall. Hopefully, by discovering how college students of today feel towards post-secondary education, and thus accurately assessing for how importantly their educational spheres rank within their lives, when in comparison to other personal life spheres, will better provide us the experts with the key that will ultimately [and hopefully] unlock the creativity that was long ago stored away with childhood memories. In large, it is believed that if one is adequately equipped with the tools necessary to hack into untapped creativity, as well as the freedoms to use this creativity as one feels fit, this might just be the missing puzzle piece that will make students want to wake up in the morning already excited to go to class, and thus engage in new learning materials in excitingly-new fun ways.

Literature Review

As individuals grow older and move further in life by advancing through the educational institution, learning with it seems to grow and branch further away from those once engaging experiences that were so dearly treasured as children. I wonder, however, why exactly is this even a societal norm or current standard, speaking in terms of education and learning as a whole? The whole situation almost contains the appearance that once you are close to near becoming an adult, life requires one to put away childish nonsense and anything in resemblance of it—thus, becoming a mature and responsible working adult. An adult whom revolves around strict adherence to getting as much done, as quickly as possible, because today society pushes for this non-stop fast-pace of one never wasting one second of their time; more often than not resulting in having absolutely no room nor time for fun within work-and-school domains as an overwhelming new reality. Oftentimes, individuals will passively resort to and accept this dichotomy that society has presented them with on the daily, often with no questions asked. Face-it: your work life, training, and education is the serious part of your life that must be completely structured, while your personal life outside of these domains become the fun and engaging parts of ones' life. However, why should one just accept that without question, especially so when nowadays there are a vast array of resources readily available to us. Resources and advancements have been made that can and will improve adult life, while also ensuring

to make it more engaging—so much so that ones' pure enjoyment of loving what it is that they do/learn, and the job they end up doing later on with this!

As past literature has abounded to clearly illustrate, one of the primary problems that remains a driving factor and continues to plague the educational-domain for many years now, is that an enormous 'separation and divide' continues to exist between school-life versus home-life; between learning something new and having fun with it (Zeichne 2010; Williamson 1957). However, this need not always be the case, especially in the now, when in this day and time we have such an abundance of technology within our short grasp, when if put to good use, could literally revolutionize learning as we know it. Indeed, research suggests that learning can be fun again, not just for child learners but for learners of every age. Stoney and Oliver (1998) have done just that by creating an interactive program at Edith Cowan University in Australia, that follows the principles of a more self-and-resource-based learning experience that appeals to the adult learner. Additionally, together they explore and contrast any current and/or traditional authoritative modes of teaching, and mix things up a bit with integrating a newer epistemology that places teachers and students on the same playing field—thus completely discarding any of the pre-existent hierarchical structure that once served as a barrier between student and teacher.

The Gold Standard: Authoritative Styles of Teaching

Yes, through intensive observations there does appear to be some typical standards existing within education. One in which authoritative teaching styles have been clearly observed, thus resulting in most coming to consider this the gold standard: the norm of teaching practices, boiling down to the conclusion where most accept and believe that this is just simply the way things are supposed to be. When students arrive in the classroom, they are immediately met with the perceptions of a rigid context, one which the teacher is always the head of the class, while all students must take a seat, face forward; begging the impression that the teacher is the authority and will be in charge of what the student will learn that day, and every other day for that matter. In simpler words, this illustrates an impression that learning is entirely a passive process where students do not get any opportunity for input, or any voice of their own, pertaining to what-where-how they learn. For instance, when a classroom setting sets such a strict adhering atmosphere, this translates over into even more difficulty for students to feel comfortable actively engaging in the learning process.

Considering however, support within literature has repetitively shown that students actually learn more efficiently and effectively

when they are allowed to actively engage the learning material. Also, allowing for the freedom to express and contribute their own views or opinions, without the need to fear any reprimand or becoming a target for embarrassment by the educator, results in more positively end-outcomes and is strongly supported by prior findings (Robinson and Kakela 2006; Leder 1987; Van Winkle 2014).

In addition, what is typical of college students of today has evolved tremendously in comparison to what once was a reality for most. Currently, the evolved college student must now juggle full-time school with full-to-part-time work, and in some instances having to additionally juggle providing basic needs and care to a family they may have at home. The present lifestyle that college students now largely experience is in no way similar nor illustrative of the 'traditional' college student standards that were once in play just a couple decades ago. Prior to this evolvement, college students went off to college shortly after graduating high school in order to live on campus within dorms alongside their fellow peers. In an overall sense, they were still being very much sheltered and treated as children in most ways. Which during that period of time, it flourished largely because that was what the social norm was for that time period and the traditional college student of past did not have many responsibilities outside of maintaining their time on their studies. Within just a couple decades, society in general has withstood many massive adaptations and changes—thus, so with it has its college students also withstood and experienced radical changes across multiple interpersonal domains that are intrinsically related and affected by the education-domain. Today, college students are met with increasingly complex responsibilities and the need to ensure that they are managing every single moment of their day wisely. If society now expects the traditional college student to grow up and accommodate themselves to living in the real-world, then why is it that the very same society continues to treat college students as children while they are on campus and in classes, as if they have no prior experience with radical societal change? The equation here does not seem to add up accurately any longer, and it is vital for the education-institution to understand and embrace that in the end, change is inevitable. If change is inevitable, then with it we must adapt and continuously revise our schemata that we previously created for specific principles and their related domains.

The Role of Power and Integrative-Exchange Within the Classroom Setting

An all-encompassing feature of Integrative-Exchange theory by Emerson and Cook (1972) pertains to how power itself, may actually be a potential that is self-built into the underlying structure of rela-

tionships and interactive exchanges. Therefore, in order for social exchanges to flow properly, in as they should due to their transactional nature, requires that an equilibrium exists—an overall equal balance of both power and dependence between all parties involved within said unit of exchange. Emerson defined this power as a potential cost that any social actor must inherently induce upon another party, in order for that party to accept. Therefore, the dependence upon this power is a cost that the social actor is willing to allow and thus tolerate within any given exchange (e.g. relationship) to better ensure all is balanced as it should be, and no one social actor is left with the potential to carry more power than the other party involved has agreed (Ritzer and Stepnisky 2013: 177). An excellent example of this theory is the ongoing relationship and exchanges that take place between individual students and their teachers that can be observed from the level of single exchanges going all the way up to the overall social structure. Essentially, each in their own has some type of power over the other largely because they both need one another for the larger structure to exist and even work. When a balance has been achieved between exchanges of interactions, this is representative of the social structure as a whole working together because both sides need something from the other in order to maintain the system overall, just as in the classroom dynamic necessitating the need for both teachers and students in order to function efficiently as meant to.

One tactic that power-dependency exchanges can utilize to better ensure this balance/equilibrium remains, both in play and unaltered, is that each social actor agrees to accept and exhibit their vulnerability, in equivalence to the other party. By utilizing such a vulnerability approach, the network-wide dependency on specific structural positions allows for an escalation of the power-dependence theory from micro-premise (e.g. individual theory) to macro-applications (e.g. worldviews and real-world applicability). For example, a micro-oriented approach extends upon the social behavior that exists within a single dyadic exchange, for instance, student-to-teacher relations within a single classroom setting. However, if we take one step back and try to fuse it with a more macro-oriented approach, it begins to branch so that in the end, it would contain the entirety of the social-structure...which ultimately itself is a larger exchange network containing multitudes of smaller individual dyadic exchanges.

In simpler terms, when considering a classroom that standing on its own, houses a single-dyadic exchange, this illustrates the micro-premises of theory. While on the other hand, education institutions nationwide and/or worldwide as a whole are the actual seat to the larger social-structure, which thus would fixate it to a macro-

premise being that it contains an all-inclusive web that joins all exchange networks simultaneously (e.g. representative of all the college students and all the teachers/educators worldwide existing within one individual overall institution known as post-secondary education).

Therefore, in this study I qualitatively seek to explore the following research questions, so that I may acquire a more precise understanding pertaining to current college student attitudes towards learning within post-secondary education establishments. By allowing the development of a more thorough understanding of this issue, it would better serve experts with the specific insights needed to encourage the creation of a more fun and engaging learning environment for all college students and/or adult learners. This study seeks to find:

RQ1: What are students' current attitudes regarding learning and education, and how importantly does it rank in their lives?

RQ2: What are students' current attitudes regarding student-to-teacher relations and interactions in the classroom?

RQ3: Do students' feel they have a voice in terms of input or collaborative strategies about their learning?

RQ4: How do students define the present structure and context of the university learning-teaching environment?

RQ5: Do college students believe that interactive learning environments are conducive to creativity and enjoyable learning experiences; more specifically, do they want to learn and attain a degree for its own sake?

Methodology

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, semi-structured interviews were utilized to better provide the researcher with the depth of knowledge needed and necessary, in particular, pertaining to the real attitudes and opinions held by college students regarding learning in post-secondary education (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006; Glaser & Strauss 1967). In addition, the researcher scheduled two observational periods with two different instructors in order to observe firsthand, the dynamics pertaining to the learning setting, teaching styles, and student-teacher power dynamics that may or may not be present within the college campus classroom.

All official documentation related to observation recordings were kept secure within a Field Research Notebook, which is a journal instrument used in social science research to track all movements

related to the study; for example, research-related movements may be physical as what is done or said while out in the field or they may be non-physical as in the critical thinking processes along the duration of the study that relates back to analysis of data and observations. Consistency coupled with frequent journal entries are detrimental in securing a reliable, consistent research document for use during the analyses processes. Along the duration of study and in process of creating the field notebook, you must keep both a written and a typed version updated at all times.

Moving back towards the actual observation periods, the two classroom observation periods took place within a building housing largely social science departments at a mid-size technical university in the Southeast. One of the instructors that was observed was male, and the other was female, to account for any variations within the power dynamic according to gender. The male-instructed class took place within a computer lab due to the quantitative nature of the course (e.g. the course was regarding statistical techniques and testing for use in social science research; while the female-instructed class took place in a generic classroom setting and pertained to the instruction of group dynamics within social settings. The female-instructed class lasted approximately 55 minutes in length in comparison to the male-instructed class, which was much longer, lasting an hour and 25 minutes in length. The female-instructed class was mainly comprised of honor students enrolled in an upper level elective class in the social sciences, while the male-instructed class was comprised of average level seniors whom were enrolled in a required course pertaining to their major, and was a necessity to their graduation.

While significant variation existing within the power dynamics and perceptions of authority and control pertaining to the variable of instructor gender, was largely observed here, it was not addressed any further within this study: aside from only notating its apparent importance due to its possible future research implications in Sociological research and the social roles and expectations pertaining to gender.

In addition to the naturalistic observations of the traditional college classroom dynamic, approximately ten interviews were completed, consisting primarily of student responses to questions pertaining to their own college experience and their own personal attitudes towards learning as a unit. Prior to beginning each interview, both the participant and researcher completed two forms that would provide the researcher with informed consent. Informed consent is a systematic form in which a research participant signs physically thus providing the acknowledgement and agreement to participate in a re-

search study; informed consent can be revoked prior to, during, or after the study, upon expressed request from the individual participating. Additionally, two identical copies of one consent form were completed per participant, thus allowing both participant and researcher to maintain a private copy for their own records. Lastly, upon the participants implying their informal consent to participate in the current study, the interviewing process swiftly entailed thereafter.

A semi-structured interview protocol was implemented, enabling the researcher to better facilitate a more equilibrium “give and take” relationship with the participants. This also allowed for the interviews to flow smoothly, while almost not seeming like an interview at all; the objective here was to ensure all participants felt safe and supported while also knowing they could speak openly and honestly, without fear of the consequences associated with one of their educators overhearing. By ensuring the interviews progressed along more-so as a back-and-forth conversation, additionally assisted with helping participants to feel comfortable and not like they were being interrogated. Upon completion of interviews, the participants were quickly debriefed as to information regarding the study topic and goals, and later thanked for their time and cooperation in the current study. Lastly, participants were pleasantly reassured that if they had any questions later on pertaining to the study, to please feel free to contact the primary investigator at any time. During the duration of time that interviews were being completed and processed, another research techniques was simultaneously performed. All interviewee recordings were transcribed into Microsoft Word, thus creating a transcription database that provided the researcher with actual physical documents reflecting the interviewees responses [verbatim] for use during data cleaning, coding, and the final analyses. All physical transcription documents were organized by interviewee assigned numbers into a research binder to ensure ease in later retrievals.

In terms of ensuring that the current study followed all appropriate research guidelines and protocols, the current study implemented a research strategy coined Grounded theory. As opposed to quantitative research approaches that typically begin with a theory and thus later must find support for this theory and their related predictions, the current study implemented a qualitative approach in which the research process begins with in the field real-time examinations of the empirical world. In the beginning, the researcher is immersed densely within the social worlds relative to their research topic and chosen subjects to examine. Only upon the researcher remaining in the field for a long period of time, do you begin the actual theory development stage. Utilizing a grounded theory technique is a per-

spective in which you develop theory while in the field; this research strategy is also known as the grounded theory perspective (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Charmaz 2000). The researchers first and primary focus when initiating the grounded theory process, entails deep thought on the research setting that will be used, how will the researcher access their chosen population, will they have access to the setting, etc. Upon firmly establishing a clear and precise research plan, then the researcher moves on to developing rapport with potential research subjects that will be interviewed later during the research process (e.g. to ensure that participants are comfortable and are ready to answer questions during the interview entirely free and honestly, the researcher utilizes the field experience time wisely by coupling setting observations with developing a more intimate relationship with the people in the setting and any potential and/or likely subjects. Likewise, it is additionally vital to note that when using the grounded theory social science technique, the researcher will develop research questions and not actual predictive hypotheses. The research questions maintain the sole utility of guiding the researcher throughout the study while ensuring that the findings reflect directly to the questions that were initially asked early on in the study. This technique increases both validity and credibility on part of the researcher.

Findings

The following is a clear representation of a scientific analysis specifying how the interviewees personally feel about learning experiences in college, as well as their overall experiences with teachers and teaching styles as a whole. More specifically, it quickly became obvious that there were three general themes that arose during interviews, all of which remained pretty consistent across all interviews performed during the duration of this study. Additionally, each specific theme was further broken down individually and later found to contain three subfields that aided a more precise illustration of what the totality of that specific theme comprised. All themes and subfield findings are introduced and explained in order to provide a more detailed description and better understanding pertaining to how these themes were identified by the researcher, and how each may relate or contrast with another discovered theme and/or subtype. These are the interviewees and this is their stories.

Inflexible Time Constraints and Time Management

A majority of the interviewees extensively expressed how the need to manage time wisely due to such inflexible time constraints and deadlines, often left them feeling as if they never really would catch up on their projects and assignments. Oftentimes, an impending

result of the rushed feeling that most students perceive, ends in them completing the project or assignment largely below their normal par. Many expressed that even when met with an intriguing project that they could not wait to dig deeper into, their earlier motivations often left them quickly and losing this initial interest because they were not allowed the time to fully engage themselves in their work like they really wanted. Students consistently reported that they felt as if they are dragged through entire semesters on end. This frustration was often expressed as if they were literally playing a game of dodgeball, and teachers were the ones throwing balls at them, hoping that one or two might hit or stick; with the balls representing the learning material thrown out during lectures and the game of dodgeball representing college overall, as a whole. As one college student quickly exclaimed,

“Um...free-time...what free-time...like during school I do not even get to spend time with my daughter, better yet, I do not even get to see her every day, most days” (P08).

The literal race for the A—overall, college students interpret gaining a post-secondary education as being the equivalent of a literal race for the A. Due to conflicts in scheduling, often a result of having to juggle several projects or papers alongside studying for exams and maintaining either part-time or full-time employment as well, in turn, often results in students doing “just enough” to hopefully earn an A. Some expressed that while they really wanted that A, most would settle just for a B or C if it meant that they didn’t have to lose sleep or miss work in order to possibly gain the A.

One interviewee contended,

“Also, the pressure of doing well...and a C counts more in college, so you have to make A’s and B’s to get the job you want later on... so it was very stressful trying to keep the GPA up” (P07).

Additional support for this issue was further illustrated by a different interviewee who questioned early-on during the project and implicated,

“Oh yeah, like you do not get, you do not have...have the time to like, let it sink in good” (P01).

Simultaneous commitments—It was pretty obvious long before the interviews were complete, that the typical traditional college student had come along ways from how they once were defined. In the past, typical college students often resided on campus in dorms with parents still footing their bills, allowing them the needed free-time to study and take care of themselves. However, today’s typical college student in no way resembles what they once were. The

new typical college student resides off campus in an apartment or house, works a part-time to full-time job, or even multiple jobs in some cases, while also having young children and family back at home that they are responsible for also. College kids aren't fully dependent upon their parents anymore like it once was, and are now beginning to live responsible adult lives at even earlier age. Most college students provided insight into how they are required to work while going to college, in order to survive and support themselves along the way. One recent college graduate described their experiences as,

"I would work in the mornings, or I would have class in the mornings and work in the afternoon...I would have 3 to 4 classes every day because I always took around 18 credit hours a semester, just to get through on time" (P06).

A sophomore further contended that,

"um, overall...class, homework, study, and work...just about every single day, so lots of study time for sure and I do have to make time to sit down and do projects...so I am ready for bed, exhausted, and am so ready to go to sleep" (P03).

Acceleration of student burn-out—A often frequent conclusion or result of college students literally juggling their daily commitments in and outside of the school setting is that they are left with little to no time to take care of themselves physically or emotionally. Students must sacrifice their sleep and their need to eat healthy and regularly in order to squeeze the most out of every second of their day. They must always put themselves last, oftentimes going months without a single day to themselves to refuel and charge up. When students consistently experience burn-out, a consequence of this arises in the form of them being unable to perform and apply themselves to the best of their ability. Ultimately, in this situation, even the best of the best college student is never quite able to fully apply and give their very best work. One interviewee expressed support of this issue and argued that,

"In one class I was just so overwhelmed that I didn't actually learn anything, you have to pray and get this one done and that one done...on a constant, I just feel I cannot keep up with it because deadlines are so close together" (P04).

Another loudly contended on further that,

"I have to give myself an hour and a half to drive here...I will start at 6am and arrive back home at 9pm, still with homework to do...so I get to bed at 2am just to wake up less than four hours later, to do it all over again" (P01).

Authoritative Standards: My Way or The Highway Dilemma

Many of the interviewees, excluding just one in particular, emphasized how upon their arrival within a classroom setting, the context of the environment seems almost staged to imply that students are there to listen, be told what they will be learning, thus resulting in students perceiving that they have little-to-no input in facilitating their learning experience.

Supporting a one-size fits all policy—The style of teaching that the majority of students claim to have experienced in college settings pertained to the typical 'traditional-styles' of lecturing and note-taking; the overall structure of the environment almost speaks to students that they all must face to the front while the teacher is at the head of the room, obviously and blatantly in charge. Research has shown that no one person learns the same way as the next, and oftentimes many will require multiple styles of teaching that are integrative and/or even accommodating to other relevant learning material. One college student exclaimed their frustrations with this learning-design by stating that,

"The normal way and style of schools support a one size fits all, and that you either get the material or you don't..." (P03).

An additional interviewee also justified feeling this way by further explaining that,

"well, it is kind of forced on you in order to make anything of yourself...like I knew I had to go to college, but it wasn't something like I wanted to go, it was I had to" (P09).

Jumping back onto what the first interviewee emphasized pretty firmly that,

"some professors do really good...some you have got to sit there and be bored to death, just to go home and read the whole textbook and guess what will be on the exam because they all [professors] like, do their own little thing based on their own personal beliefs and opinions" (P01).

No voice—One student whom is a junior-level college student whom does not live locally, went on to describe their experiences as feeling like they always hit a brick wall in terms of the many challenges that students endure, but never having any voice or say in their future,

"group work is always a challenge for me, my schedule is crazy and makes it difficult to get done...I just rather do it by myself...they

can never meet when I can, so I end up having to take off work and driving over an hour to meet them on their time” (P04).

However, one interviewee illustrated some non-support for this issue and went on to communicate that she did feel as if she does have ‘some say or choice’ in terms related to her college education. She went on further to express that,

“having a voice really depends on the teacher, but I feel like I got a choice just because I chose my major...in high school you don’t get to choose your major but while in college you do, so you get some say in what you learn...some classes I felt we didn’t need in the major...I haven’t used these once since being in the field this year” (P07).

Teaching styles—

“I think it would be something good to do at the beginning of the year when everyone gets their books, so say, hey skim through your book and pick a topic that you’d like me to go over this year and I will fit it into my schedule...but the only suggestions we do get is the last week of school and they fix it for the year after, not us” (P07).

Another provided their personal experience in regards to moving through the different levels of college and the foundation that is provided them during this difficult transition,

“sometimes I will remember a concept being brought from an old class, but it is never evaluated fully and I feel we just gotta catch on to this because this is the standard of how it is for everyone” (P02).

Power Dynamics in Full-Play: The Student -versus- The Experts:

While some college students did express that they can perceive a power dynamic present in the classroom learning environment, a few others contended that they do not perceive this in their study or major. For instance, one nontraditional student whom is studying in the Human Ecology of Child Development field had stated that her professors maintain a more open and equal playing field between student and teacher, often offering them the needed social support in order to succeed in life. When asked if she perceived any power dynamics, she quick-witted replied back that,

“I have never felt like that, I really feel like a lot, especially the human ecology majors and professors, are able to relate with each other and um, they kind of take the time to get to know us and what is going on in our lives...I think they take the time to know how you learn so I feel it’s easier, I think it is just easier to get through

college if you are comfortable with your professors...they are just really encouraging while very professional, but at the same time” (P08).

Student-teacher Relations—

“you need a supportive relationship with them where you feel like you can approach them with any problems” (P05).

Visible Hierarchies—One student further explained that sometimes this seems apparent just in how the entire structure of the learning settings are put together in such a way to convey that the teacher holds all the power and say,

“it just most times doesn’t seem equal at all and you get some that make that apparent, that they are in charge...with night teachers who aren’t so traditional, I found it easier to feel equal with them because they will joke with us, the ones that are here during the day were always very structured” (P02).

Lack of Social Support—the first interviewee contended in response to her having no social support systems to rely on outside of the school domain, that she felt as if she really had been pretty lucky to have met one teacher in particular who has kind of guided her away from a prior life of abuse by her father and manages to keep her close-by under wing,

“my professor and advisor named Dr. Andy...she wanted to make sure I took positive psych this semester because its positive enlightenment and would help with all the negativity...and I really, I should have taken that class when I took stats [emphasized to communicate importance], maybe it would have balanced it all out” (P01).

Discussion

RQ1: What are students’ current attitudes regarding learning and education, and how importantly does it rank in their lives?

In general, while faced with many challenges and barriers, the college students whom were interviewed largely felt that it was all worth it in the end. Most understood that in order to achieve a long-term goal, such as a four-year degree, required that they put off any short-term declarations of joy and satisfaction. One thing they felt may have better prepared them for their time in college perhaps would entail offering more introductory type courses during the first semester of their freshman year that went over proper studying habits and techniques, along with how to adequately manage ones limited time they are given per day. Many complained

that upon their arrival to college it was often expected and assumed that they all already had the proper foundations in education to begin building their college degrees upon, however, students coming from counties with smaller schools and less resources didn't always come equipped with this type of foundation in place. Rather, some of the students who expressed less positive attitudes towards college overall were in fact the students who had dealt with these struggles early on in their college careers.

RQ2: What are students' current attitudes regarding student-to-teacher relations and interactions in the classroom?

Overall, students do not feel that teachers are very supportive of them and their learning, aside from the rarity of a couple occasions in which certain faculty members did take that extra step in providing the student with social support. Several students that were interviewed indicated that they currently had no family or outside social support systems and felt that the university should have a larger role in ensuring its students feel encouraged and supported while they are enrolled in their courses. Several also made some suggestions into this idea that would provide the university the open opportunity to extend a hand of support to the student body. When students feel that they are supported and that someone within the school has their backs in a sense, it positively influences them to succeed and perform better within classes. Once students gain the motivation to perform while feeling supported in their efforts, it allows them the ample opportunity to feel that they can have fun and engage the learning material. Ultimately, better bridging the fun sphere to the learning sphere.

RQ3: Do students feel they have a voice in terms of input or collaborative strategies about their learning?

To some degree, students do feel that they have a voice in their own education. For example, most feel that since they hold the responsibility of choosing what major and field of study to partake in, that in a sense they are free in choosing what they learn. However, most feel that the actual curriculum and material introduced to them within the classroom is based largely upon the teachers own personal beliefs and opinions. Many students felt that there should be something in place that ensures the material they are learning is more objective and open to all, not just tailored according to the professor. Additionally, most feel that current curriculum structures in place are tailored to fit a one size fits all audience of students, which is most certainly not the case. Students are individuals and therefore each learn in their own individual ways, and by allowing students to help facilitate their own learning serves to better fit their wants and needs.

RQ4: How do students define the present structure and context of the university learning-teaching environment?

Somewhere around 80% of the students that were interviewed indicated that the present structure and context surrounding the university learning-teaching environment was in fact geared towards a more authoritative power dynamic. Of the students interviewed, 20% did not feel that the college structure that they had been exposed to was authoritative or power dominating at all. However, the remaining 20% that identified in the latter all belonged to the field of study of human ecology and child development. Therefore, this indicates that a possible change in direction is underway within this field of study, that perhaps has not made its way across to other fields of study. The majority of students that identified with authoritative power dynamics of teaching belonged to the fields of study such as: Psychology, Sociology, Mechanical Engineering, and Business Administration.

RQ5: Do college students believe that interactive learning environments are conducive to creativity and enjoyable learning experiences; more specifically, do they want to learn and attain a degree for its own sake?

While few did express that they have always held a deep desire and love for learning, many others expressed their decision of going to college as being more of a matter of force or necessity, rather than an actual desire or want of learning for their own sake. One thing in particular that seemed to influence the attitudes that students held in this regard was that of how their own parents attached any value to attaining an education. Some of the questions towards the end were geared towards gaining insight into how the students own family felt in large towards post-secondary education as a whole. For example, one way of assessing for this entailed finding out if there was any presence of books within their homes while growing up. For instance, the more books that a family maintained in the home and the more books read to or with children, should better help indicate how importantly learning ranked in their lives overall. Upon analysis of interview responses, it did in fact indicate that the responses to this question accurately portrayed how importantly learning ranked in their lives and the lives of their families. Therefore, a result of how important education ranked in their personal lives also indicated the students level of commitment and time that they were willing to set aside towards learning new material.

Conclusion

By gaining a better understanding on a more personal level, pertaining to how college students feel [individually and generally overall]

towards learning in post-secondary education, shines the necessary light to help further direct this needed attention towards bridging the dichotomy that many college students today perceive. That is, that our home and personal lives are the fun and enjoyable division all while our work and educational lives are the tedious and boring division. However, by being active participants in ones' own learning experiences, while also extending on life knowledge, wisdom, and understanding regarding the many complexities of life, can be and already is for some: extremely fun and very rewarding. Therefore, all the more reason to better identify the specific contexts and factors that give young adults the impression that working towards a life goal, such as their education, only requires minimal effort to do well enough to pass for the grade and move on. The result of the just well enough to pass mentality is that adult students are not retaining vital knowledge accrued during their training, beyond the classrooms front door.

Until the atmosphere of power present inside the classroom and within the social exchanges taking place are nourished and allowed to evolve into a more supportive student-to-teacher-relationship fostering equality, I am afraid the two will remain unbridged. Sadly, when vital resources that are readily available thanks to technological advances, but just aren't being bridged and utilized within the learning environment, this ongoing pattern of appearing seemingly of two separate worlds and spheres will continue to be a reality inside the educational institution. More specifically, young adult students will continue to view their teachers and mentors as being of an entirely different species completely.

Implications for Future Research and Limitations

By better understanding the young minds that are being trained up to partake in society, allows us to better direct which doors to open when doing future research. By and in large, one area within the university setting that needs further research is that of how the power dynamics within the classroom context vary according to the gender of the instructor. If we are going to actively seek to tear down the walls that are power that are still present within the educational institution, we must first understand the many ways in which they work and are built in the first place. Additionally, how does ones' background and environment, for example: social class and level of education, affect how they may perceive the presence of power within the learning realm. These are all viable directions that are warranted in researching further.

Also, by utilizing a different outlook and design within the study could reap potential vital information not yet found, such as, using a more deductive design in addition to current qualitative efforts. If

findings could be quantified, perhaps we could tell just how statistically significant the current issue at hand is while also improving the overall validity and reliability within the data. Lastly, understanding how college students feel towards post-secondary education only provides us with one side of the spectrum because it doesn't account for how current educators, whom are also past students, feel in terms of what works and what doesn't inside the classroom setting.

It seems that if perhaps one were to effectively apply integrative-exchange theory in this regard, one would need to ensure the necessary requirement of mutual agreement and understanding on behalf of both student and educator, on a more intricate cohesive level. Any relationship is a two-way street and the student-to-teacher dynamic is no different in this sense. Lastly, the necessity and great need for pilot studies set up in different areas in order to work out any program kinks goes without saying, to ensure accurate consistent results in the end. There are a number of viable routes left that could be taken further with this study and this study is only the first of hopefully many more to come. The answer to the question of "can learning be fun and engaging" is YES! Learning can and should always be fun for the one learning...the only thing that remains untouched is the 'how, when, and where' do we begin?

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