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Thematic issue from the Melbourne World Congress of Sociology

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Message from the Editor

Dear Readers, Contributors and RC25 Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to introduce the June 2024 issue to you. It is our 23rd issue in the history of ISA RC25. You will find a thematic part, hand-picked and edited by Keiji Fujiyoshi, the President of ISA RC25 and Rika Yamashita*,* and a non-thematic part. Guest editors provide a brief overview of the selection of articles 1-3, so I will only note that the authors represent scholars who took part in the Melbourne Congress of Sociology and presented during the RC25 ISA sessions.

In this short introduction, I will focus on three articles in the non-thematic section. The section opens with an article by Marthinus Conradie and Olga Lasocka-Bełc dedicated to critical diversity literacy and structure-facing virtue among South African students. The researchers provide strong and useful conclusions about belonging and inclusion, identity and becoming aware of the biases and the potential conflict between what one is learning at the university and the views cultivated in other settings. It is a compelling work, that may be useful to educators and also an example of a qualitative approach and the analysis of interview materials. Remaining within educational settings, the article is followed by a mixed-method study amongst students about their experiences of first-year studies to become a teacher, with a special focus on the discourse on wellbeing and mental health that they produced during interviews. The article is prepared by a team of Albanian educators from Durres University who identified, using statistical methods, the above-average knowledge on mental health and well-being of higher education students of pedagogical faculty, yet they also found that the students were unaware of factors about their own mental health and wellbeing. The researchers identified the areas for concern of higher education institutions and tutors within. Last but not least, there is an interesting multimodal critical discourse analysis carried out by researchers from Thailand (Guangwei Wu and Savitri Gadavanij), to identify how the middle class is represented in a Chinese magazine. Authors find that a homogenous and male-oriented representation may support the ideology of consumer culture, which is responsible for the establishment and reproduction of social stratification through consumption in China. The article provides an interesting insight into analytical approaches when dealing with a material from journals.

Before we publish the list of reviewers for the year 2024, I offer my sincere thanks to the reviewers who accepted our calls for review. It is an ongoing struggle to find suitable and willing scholars, with relevant expertise and experience. Your work is valuable and of great importance. Thank you once again.

With warm greetings to all RC25 members and beyond.

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Message from the Guest Editor

Keiji Fujiyoshi
Rika Yamashita1

XX ISA World Congress of Sociology was held from June 25 to July 1, 2023 in Melbourne, Australia and it was a great success. According to the ISA statistics, it had 4,701 participants (3,028 in-person and 1,673 virtual)[2]. RC25 hosted nine sessions, six joint sessions, co-hosted four joint sessions (with RC05 Racism, Nationalism, Indigeneity and Ethnicity, RC15 Sociology of Health, RC30 Sociology of Work, and TG04 Sociology of Risk and Uncertainty), and also had a business meeting, which was a huge success. We served as Program Coordinators together with Frida Petersson, Sweden, who virtually participated in the Congress.

After the wonderful success in Melbourne, we have been invited to take a role of guest editors of the special issue of LD&S by Anna Odrowaz-Coates, its Editor-in-Chief. We are so pleased to share some of the insightful and stimulating discussions there with you. Also, we express our sincere gratitude to the contributors.

Here is the Call for Papers published in the Q4, 2023 issue of the RC25 newsletter.

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CALL FOR PAPERS for June 2024 ISSUE of LDS – Melbourne World Congress of Sociology

Although we receive a steady flow of papers (more contributions that we can process), we wish to offer to fast-track the articles based on presentations from the RC25 sessions in Melbourne.

IMPORTANT DATES:
- 31st of December 2023: Due date for submission
- February-March 2024: Feedback from the reviewers
- March-April 2024: Submission of the revised articles
- June 2024: Publication of the special issue

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This thematic issue from the Melbourne World Congress of Sociology will be published in June 2024.

Thank you for responding to the call.

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Original Articles

Thematic issue from
the Melbourne World Congress of Sociology

Akihiko Sato   "Vaccine Discourse and Vaccine-Induced
Sufferings: Discourse analysis of the promotion
and hesitation of vaccination in Japan"

Vaccine Discourse and Vaccine-Induced Sufferings: Discourse analysis of the promotion and hesitation of vaccination in Japan

Akihiko Sato[1]

Abstract

The pandemic of the new coronavirus and the introduction of coronavirus vaccines prompted the production of vaccines and vaccine discourses around the world. The same situation has been observable in Japan. The purpose of this study is to discuss what I call "the social phenomenon of vaccines" in Japan. The present article will describe the characteristics of the vaccine discourse and consider the relationship between the vaccine discourse and vaccine-induced sufferings, which refer to the experience of social damages and difficulties caused by vaccines.

Firstly, I will review the research method of the previous studies of vaccination. It has been shown that both pro-vaccine and anti-vaccine existed from the beginning of the history of vaccination, and in that sense, the existence of both pro-vaccine and anti-vaccine can be considered as a part of "the social phenomenon of vaccines" from the beginning. Inspired by the Strong Program, I will explain a method which would enable me to describe both pro and anti-vaccine without a priori assumptions. One such method can be found in the repertoire analysis by Gilbert and Mulkey (1984), who analyzed controversies in scientific research. Following their method, I will explore how the vaccine discourse was developed in Japan. The vaccine discourse in Japan is found in three different types of literature, which discuss vaccine promotion, vaccine harms, and vaccine safety.

Secondly, I will identify three kinds of repertoires: "componentist repertoire", "manipulationist repertoire" and "psychologism repertoire". I will then discuss the features of "the social phenomenon of vaccines" by examining the relationship among these repertoires and how these repertoires work. Finally, I will discuss how vaccine discourse is related to the discourse of vaccine-induced sufferings. In conclusion, vaccination, by its very nature, cannot be separated from the impossibility of direct experience of vaccination. Therefore, the more vaccine develops, the more vaccine discourse flourishes.

Keywords

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Introduction

The pandemic of the new coronavirus declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020 and the development of vaccines against it prompted the production of vaccines and even the discourse related to vaccines. Around the world, what can be called vaccine discourse has emerged. Japan is no exception. This study discusses the vaccine discourse in Japan and highlights that vaccine discourse in Japan is unique in a sense that it establishes the relationship between the vaccine and vaccine-induced sufferings. It is not simply a discussion of the characteristics of vaccines. Rather, it has a distinctive feature, which is related to the vaccine-induced sufferings. As for the concept of drug-induced sufferings being unique to Japan[2], such a relationship could be considered a characteristic specific to the vaccine discourse in Japan.

I, along with my colleagues, have been studying "drug-induced sufferings" as an experience of social damage caused by pharmaceuticals (Hongo and Sato, 2023)[3]. Drug-induced sufferings refer to the damage and the difficulties not only in health but also in life, caused by medicines. The discourse on "vaccine-induced sufferings" (hereafter as the "VIS discourse") has been considered as one of these sufferings and has been reformulated recently. Vaccine-induced sufferings are one type of drug-induced suffering that have been legally and institutionally recognized as a damage to be compensated, caused by officially introduced vaccination in Japan. However, in the vaccine discourse, the narratives of the victims and the VIS discourse are often quoted as if they undermined the significance of vaccination (e.g., Iwata, 2020; Kinoshita, 2021; Funase, 2014). The meanings of VIS discourse have often been reformulated arbitrarily and consequently, often taken for granted by the general public. It has been overlooked by sociologists at large. Therefore, as one of the sociological issues in the current situation of widespread vaccine discourse, it is necessary to consider what function those vaccine discourse serve in contemporary Japanese society through the examination of the relationship between VIS and vaccine discourse. In other words, it is necessary to discuss the nature of "vaccine as a social entity" and "social phenomenon of vaccines" in Japan, as they reflect the relationship between VIS and vaccine discourse.

As will be discussed in the next section, most of the previous research on vaccine has focused on the histories of vaccine introductions and the political backgrounds and/or results of such introductions. Some recent research discusses vaccine hesitation. However, there is no research that discusses vaccines as social entities nor that discuss vaccines as social phenomenon in terms of vaccine discourse.

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[2] The term "drug-induced sufferings", according to the research by the author and his colleagues, is a concept unique to Japan. In other countries, the damages caused by drugs have been recognized as the discrete events, such that the damage caused by thalidomide in the 1960s has been considered as the thalidomide incident, and the damage caused by the HIV-contaminated blood products in the 1980s and 1990s as the AIDS incident. However, the concept of drug-induced sufferings makes us consider these cases as the examples of the same social problem as the drug-induced sufferings.

[3] (Hongo and Sato, 2023) constitutes of 12 chapters and 10 columns written by 19 authors, as the results of the activities over the decades of the research meetings on drug-induced sufferings.

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Then, first and foremost, it is necessary to describe how the vaccine discourse is developing in the Japanese language world. This is because it is necessary to grasp the whole picture of vaccine discourse. As a result of such a description, it will be possible to discuss the nature of the vaccine discourse and the meaning of its distribution in the Japanese language. Next, it will be necessary to discuss what vaccine discourse is doing with the transformation of the meaning of VIS discourse. For if it is largely accepted with its meaning transformed, then there must be a mechanism or situation that makes this possible. Such mechanism will clarify some features of the contemporary society with "vaccines as social entities" and "social phenomenon of vaccines".

1. Review of sociological and anthropological studies on vaccine

As in other countries, prior sociological and anthropological research on vaccines in the Japanese language was accelerated by the Covid-19 disaster. Representative studies in Japan prior to the Covid-19 disaster consisted of historical studies unique to Japan, with references to some U.S. studies. Such studies include a historical study of the introduction of vaccination in the United States (Colgrove, 2006), a study discussing the dilemma of vaccine administration (Tezuka, 2010), a study of the politics connected to vaccine introduction in the United States (Conis, 2015) and a historical study of the vaccination for smallpox in Japan (Kozai, 2019; 2020). In addition, research on rumors surrounding vaccine hesitation (Larson, 2020=2021) and issues related to vaccine-induced suffering without remedy (Noguchi, 2022) were introduced after the pandemic. Except for Larson's study, the others attempt to historically clarify the social reality of vaccines by discussing the background, process and result of vaccine introduction.

Colgrove's study (Colgrove, 2006) is a historical account of the conflict between government (coercion) and individual freedom (choice) in the process of vaccine introduction. This conflict has been a common thread through the vaccine discourse up to the present. Furthermore, it is clear that the eradication of smallpox established the concept of "eradication of viruses," which is one of the ideas behind the current vaccination regime, and that public health policy evolved around this concept. It is also argued that the era of infectious diseases ended with the improvement of nutrition and sanitation associated with modernization, which gave birth to the complexity of the vaccine issue.

Colgrove's discussion points to a number of issues in vaccine research that continue to the present day, not only in Japan. The clarification of the issue of the conflict between the coercive power of the state and the freedom of the individual is especially important. Studies on vaccines in Japan have also discussed this point from several aspects. Tezuka discusses the dilemma that arises in this conflict. He discusses the postwar vaccination administration based on the dilemma that emerged as a result of the vaccination disaster: if vaccinations are not administered, the possibility of contracting infectious diseases increases, while if vaccinations are administered, the risk of adverse health effects due to adverse reactions is increased, which must be compensated for (Tezuka, 2010). And Kozai discusses the process of the introduction of vaccination from the West and how its meaning was interpreted in relation to nationalism and other factors. She also discusses

the discovery and introduction of hygienic thought in Japan and its relationship to a type of Japanese ethic, that death from infectious disease was a natural fate, while death by vaccination was artificial and should be avoided (Kozai 2019).

During the subsequent Covid-19 disaster, Larson's study on vaccine rumors (Larson 2020=2021) was translated, and Noguchi discussed Japan's immunization policies (Noguchi 2022) at a time when the Covid-19 crisis was winding down. Noguchi used the four social movements related to vaccination to discuss Foucault's biopolitics in the position of the state and the neglect of adverse events caused by vaccination as a systemic and structural problematic issue. Furthermore, many studies have emerged as being stimulated by the new vaccine introduced by the Covid-19 disaster (a situation that would eventually lead to its use). However, many of them merely covered less relevant topics to the coronavirus vaccine because the vaccine had not yet been developed (e.g., Mima, 2020).

The recent sociological and anthropological studies of vaccine can be divided into two types. The first one is those that discuss the reasons for vaccine hesitation. It discusses the discourses and attitudes of people who hesitate for vaccinations based on the (implicit) assumption of their effectiveness, or at least their necessity. It also includes the discussion of the ways in which these discourses and attitudes are shaped. The second one is to discuss vaccines as a problem of power in contemporary society. A typical example is the discussion of vaccines as an element of "biopolitics," which is modeled on Foucault's biopolitics. Thus, this one, although not explicitly stated as such, forms a critique of, or contextualizes, opposition to the current state of affairs regarding vaccines (almost mandatory vaccination).

Many studies acknowledge that there is a division or conflict concerning the value or meaning of vaccine and vaccination. A frame of argument is proposed dichotomously; its discussions focus on either the vaccine necessity and effectiveness or its problematic nature. The historical analysis of vaccines (Colgrove, 2006; Kozai, 2019; 2020) reveals that the conflict over vaccines has been observed since the initial introduction of the vaccine. Such a division itself, or the very characteristics of the discourses surrounding it, has to be examined as the focus of the study as a contemporary social phenomenon. Therefore, I argue that it is necessary to consider the conflict itself as a part of the "social phenomenon of vaccines" (i.e., as an inevitable part of that phenomenon). If so, describing the logic of the conflict is one of the ways to clarify the contemporary characteristics of the "social phenomenon of vaccines".

2. Research question and method of analysis

In order to analyze the contemporary characteristics of the "social phenomenon of vaccines", I will focus on the conflict between discourse of vaccine promotion and vaccine avoidance as the object of analysis. Drawing on the principle of impartiality, I look beyond the implicit premise that takes the vaccine promotive question "why vaccine hesitation occurs" as a taken-for-granted fact and the vaccine avoidant attitude as a false one. In

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doing so, it will be possible to portray the discourses of both promotion and avoidance as parts of the "social phenomenon of vaccines".

To do this, I first consulted with the Strong Program in the field of sociology of scientific knowledge. The Strong Program is a criterion proposed by David Bloor in his sociological analysis of scientific knowledge. It consists of four principles (tenets) that are as follow; (1) causality, (2) impartiality, impartial with respect to truth/falsity, rational/irrational, and success/failure, (3) symmetry, symmetrical in explanatory style, and (4) reflexivity, explanatory pattern must be applicable to sociology (Bloor 1976: 4-5). Bloor discusses in detail to respond to actual and/or supposed objections to the Strong Program idea. He also discusses the problem of objectivist argumentation as a problem that goes against the Strong Program.

We need to take a critical approach to posting a question such as "Why does vaccine hesitation occur?". The research based on such questions is against the impartiality of the principle above. Describing both discourses of vaccine promotion and vaccine avoidance and giving the same weight has been frequently criticized. However, such criticism would be objectivist and contrary to the Strong Program. Just to clarify, I am not discussing knowledge surrounding vaccines by an analysis with the "social representation" perspective as Bloor did in his research. Rather, in analyzing the vaccine discourse, I am inspired by the four principles above and analyze the mechanisms that make both promotive and avoidant vaccine discourse possible. I discuss the characteristics of vaccine discourses and their relationship to VIS discourses.

In order to analyze the vaccine discourse including both sides, we consider a method in Nigel Gilbert and Michael Mulkey's research on science, which has been described as a prototype for discourse analysis (Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984). Gilbert and Mulkey studied the controversy surrounding the biochemical study of "oxidative phosphorylation," or energy production (ATP) by respiration, which was controversial in the chemical community at that time. In doing so, they did not assume either side of the controversy to be correct in advance, but rather, through describing the characteristics of the discourse on both sides and identifying the specific discourse named "repertoire" used in the talks by both sides, they described the social phenomenon of scientific controversy and examined how the actual social phenomenon of science is constructed (Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984). Following their research, one of the main purposes of this study, along with the principle of impartiality, is to identify any "repertoire" and to describe how it constructs "social phenomenon of vaccines". In other words, rather than assuming one side to be right in advance about the conflict over vaccines, we will find in both sides of discourse the way to construct "social phenomenon of vaccines" and clarify the nature of such phenomenon.

My analytical method is "discourse analysis" that was developed by Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) and their successors. "Discourse analysis" today often refers to a method of analysis in discursive psychology led by social psychologists at Loughborough University in the UK (Potter and Wetherell, 1992; Stoke et al, 2012). As a sociologist, I have been using discourse analysis as a method to describe the social worlds from a sociological point of view, inspired by the prototype, which was originally a method to describe people's

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discourse production and operation in the sociology of science (Sato 2006; 2009; 2017; 2022). Discourse analysis here is a method that regards the discourse not as a medium of information transmission, but as a social action that "does something" and constructs social phenomenon and social worlds. In the following sections, we use this method to analyze and describe "what discourse does" to construct such a phenomenon of vaccines.

3. Experience of Vaccine-induced sufferings and vaccine discourse

Before focusing on vaccine discourse of both sides, we clarify VIS discourse as being the experience of vaccine-induced sufferings and how the meaning of VIS discourse is transformed in the context of vaccine discourse. This is one of the starting points of this study and it is necessary to discuss vaccine discourse in Japan in the first place.

3.1 Vaccine-induced sufferings and the Problematic Nature of Vaccines

In Japan, vaccine-induced sufferings have been regarded as an example of drug-induced sufferings. The term "drug-induced sufferings (yakugai in Japanese)" refers to the experience of social damages and difficulties, such as discrimination and exclusion, as well as health problems caused by pharmaceuticals. The term "drug-induced sufferings" is a descriptive concept that indicates not only the side effects and adverse reactions of drugs, which are often discussed only as medical problems related to the body, but also the social difficulties experienced by the victims due to these side effects and adverse reactions, and has become a relatively common concept in Japan since the drug-induced SMON (subacute myelo-optico-neuropathy), that became a major problem in the 1970s (Sato, 2023a). In Japan, it is known as a social problem that has continuously occurred as the thalidomide incident, the drug-induced SMON, the HIV-contaminated blood product induced AIDS incident, etc., starting with the diphtheria vaccination disaster case (1948) that occurred under the GHQ administration after the defeat in the Pacific War. Among these, health and social sufferings caused by vaccine can be called "vaccine-induced sufferings, VIS (wakuchin yakugai in Japanese) (Sato 2023b). The above-mentioned diphtheria vaccination disaster and the MMR vaccine-induced sufferings that occurred in the 1980s are well known as VIS. In recent years, adverse events caused by HPV vaccines have also been included in the discussion[4].

Most drug-induced sufferings have been revealed through court cases in Japan (Hongo 2023). The first drug-induced sufferings lawsuit was filed in the 1960s for thalidomide. Subsequently, drug-induced SMON, the HIV-contaminated blood product induced AIDS incident, and the blood products induced hepatitis C were all shown to be drug-induced during the trial process, and as a result, were institutionally recognized as such. The term "institutionally recognized" here means that the existence of the drug-induced sufferings

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[4] From the late 1960s to the 1970s, a social problem known as the "vaccine disaster" occurred in Japan, resulting in the revision of the Immunization Law. However, the "vaccine disaster" is not usually considered to be the drug-induced sufferings. This is because the problem was considered to be an institutional inadequacy connected to remedies for adverse reactions after vaccination, rather than a problem related to the vaccine system and its inoculation.

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is officially recognized and compensated in some form, through settlement or other means. In particular, the 2008 settlement between the plaintiffs and the government over the drug-induced hepatitis C lawsuit has led to the institutional recognition that drug-induced sufferings are not only a problem of the pharmaceutical administration but also a social problem, including education[5].

Vaccine-induced sufferings are one such institutionally recognized drug-induced sufferings. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) now conducts educational activities to prevent drug-induced sufferings and records the voices of victims as valuable testimonies, in which the testimony of a victim of MMR vaccine-induced sufferings was recorded.

The following quote was taken from a transcription of that testimony. Here, we would like to consider the characteristics of VIS discourse.

(Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aIVDftSGKY).

(Extract 01)

1 My daughter was born in June 1989, when the MMR vaccine was introduced in Japan. In
2 April 1991, when my daughter was 1 year and 10 months old, her grandmother visited a
3 pediatrician with her with an intention of having her vaccinated only against measles. But
4 her grandmother was unable to refuse the doctor's recommendation that she only need one
5 dose instead of three, so she was given the MMR vaccine. Two years had already passed
6 after the introduction of the MMR vaccine and there had been many adverse reactions since
7 the beginning, there were still some places like such clinic that were actively promoting
8 MMR over measles alone. Why was MMR vaccination not stopped earlier and its safety
9 reviewed? Should there be a vaccine that threatens the life and future of a small child? My
10 daughter suffered a severe encephalopathy 14 days after the vaccination. Although she
11 luckily survived, she was never the same as before. Since then, I have lived with the
12 encouragement given by my daughter, who continues to light her candle of life innocently,
13 even if she cannot do anything by herself. Even now, however, I still regret that we did
14 have the MMR vaccine back then.

In the video, the daughter, who was directly damaged by the vaccine, is shown lying in the foreground, while the victim's father is speaking behind the bed-ridden daughter about their drug-induced experience. What is the victim's father saying here? The vaccine itself is not the problem. If we focus on the last sentence starting from Line 13-14 only, it may appear that way, but if we consider the previous statements from the very beginning, we can see that there was a problem with the safety of the vaccination, and the inadequate safety checks.

Let us delve into this from the discourse analytic perspective. As noted above, the fact that the daughter was disabled by the MMR vaccine-induced suffering is the basis for the problem

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[5] Based on the 2002 settlement between the plaintiffs and the government regarding drug-induced Jacob's disease and the 2008 settlement between the plaintiffs and the government regarding drug-induced hepatitis, the MHLW and the MEXT are currently conducting educational programs regarding drug-induced sufferings.

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of vaccine safety and the problem of inadequate confirmation of that safety. However, merely making an issue of the vaccine damage may deny that the present daughter, who is disabled because of such damage, has been living with difficulties ever since. In other words, just talking about vaccine safety may deny and devalue his daughter's precious life. Here the father's dilemma is discursively formulated. A positive formulation is made about the daughter (Line 11-13), in that the father has been encouraged simply by the fact that she has been alive. By saying this, whilst the testimony affirms her daughter's current state of life, complaining about the damage caused by the MMR vaccine is implicitly made. We can recognise that the VIS discourse is produced around the idea that the victims always exist. In other words, this testimony was constructed in the dilemmatic context in which two conflicting situations coexist and are balanced. This excerpt makes visible that discourse on VIS is organized to construct such balanced situations.

3.2. Vaccine-Induced Sufferings in Vaccine Discourse

How is MMR VIS constructed in vaccine discourse? Although it is not widely known for vaccine-induced sufferings, the MMR vaccine was problematic as it was believed to cause autism. The scandal of Dr. Andrew Wakefield's paper pointing this out, published in the famous medical journal "The Lancet" but later found to be fraudulent, with the paper being retracted and Dr. Wakefield's medical license revoked, is something of a staple in vaccine discourse. Although the paper was retracted, it is sometimes said that the relationship between MMR and autism is still being pointed out, while the scandal itself is said to have spawned widespread vaccine hesitation. Many Japanese vaccine discourses also refer to it[6].

However, the situation is different when it comes to the MMR VIS. A review of vaccine discourses based on books published in Japan in recent years reveals that VIS has been discussed in three ways. One is that it is discussed as a case that points to the toxicity of the MMR vaccine itself. The second is as a case that points to the causes and problems of vaccine hesitation. The last one to be mentioned is as a case that points to issues surrounding vaccine safety. This last one is not so different from the testimony above. Therefore, let us look at each of the first two with examples.

The first example is to refer to the toxicity of the vaccine itself. Funase (Funase, 2014 (No.20 in the Table 1)) mentioned MMR vaccine-induced sufferings in the context of discussing the "cervical cancer vaccine issue".[7]

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[6] For example, "However, because of the fraudulent nature of the research, the Lancet paper was revoked in 2010, and Wakefield's medical license was revoked. Thus, the theory that autism has nothing to do with vaccines appears to have triumphed. However, this is only the beginning, and even now the vaccine-caused theory of autism persists" (Kondo, 2017: 157 (No.29)), and it is argued that the components of the MMR vaccine are the cause of autism (similar points are made in (Utsumi, 2018 (No.32)) and elsewhere). On the other hand, after introducing the history of that scandal, "In the meantime, however, it has gained tremendous support from parents who oppose vaccines and continues to spread disinformation about vaccines" (Kinoshita, 2021: 42 (No.50)), which is also discussed as a prime example of disinformation causing vaccine hesitation.

[7] In Japan, the HPV vaccine is commonly referred to as the "cervical cancer vaccine." In 2016, 63 people filed lawsuits in four district courts across Japan seeking damages for adverse events caused by this "cervical cancer vaccine". This is called the "HPV Vaccine-induced Sufferings Lawsuit".

> The Ministry of Health and Welfare initially covered up the fact that the number of victims had increased to such an extent. Even at a meeting of experts, the Ministry had emphasized them never to disclose the fact. One of the reporters who covered the case testified: "The government did not want to investigate the case itself at first, but simply waited for reports of adverse reactions," and "The experts said nothing because they were funded by the pharmaceutical companies." .../All vaccines, without exception, are designated as powerful drugs. .../That is because they are so toxic. (Funase, 2014: 43-44 (No.20))

This description focuses on the previously mentioned damage caused by the MMR vaccine medication, particularly the safety issues and the failure to immediately address them (or rather, to cover them up). Nevertheless, while referring to them, by placing them in a different context from the testimonies connected to the MMR VIS, it indicates the problem with the vaccine itself[8]. In other words, the problem of MMR VIS is not a problem of safety or inadequate confirmation of safety, but rather a problem of not confirming or concealing the toxicity of the vaccine itself. VIS is thus defined as a situation in which the toxicity of a vaccine is exposed.

The second example is about the cause of vaccine hesitation. Kinoshita discussed the MMR vaccines-sufferings in the chapter "History of Vaccine Hesitation" in his book (Kinoshita, 2021(No.50)) and even claims that the court results of VIS were too severe and that the mumps vaccine in question "did not have any definite safety problems"[9]. Even though the damages caused by VIS were not linked to any judgments about the merits and demerits of vaccines, but just to sufferings experienced by victims, talking of such damages is criticized because those talks are said to have influenced later revisions of the immunization system and media attitudes about the HPV vaccine (Kinoshita, 2021: 151-152(No.50)).

As described above, although VIS is the institutionally recognized damage, many vaccine discourses nowadays do not position it as a damage or difficulty to health and life but rather, discuss issues such as the toxicity of the vaccine itself and the causes of vaccine hesitation. VIS are utilized as a resource, which has been transformed to mean something different from the very experience of vaccine-induced sufferings. In other words, the problematic nature of vaccines and the necessity of vaccines are discussed at a level divorced from the actual experience with vaccines.

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[8] The article cited in (Funase, 2014 (No.20)) in this section is from May 12, 2013, although the text refers to the June 12, 2013, Tokyo Shimbun (Newspaper). The reporter mentioned here is Kunihiko Kumamoto (now a professor at Edogawa University), who covered the MMR VIS as a reporter for TV program at the time. Kumamoto's comments, while acknowledging the effectiveness of the vaccine, insist on the necessity of investigating adverse reactions and confirming safety, and do not accuse the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MHW, at that time), as Funase argued. Funase (Funase, 2014) altered the comments to fit his own context (such alterations are characteristic of the series of texts by Funase).

[9] Although the details are not discussed here, (Kinoshita, 2021(No.50))'s criticisms of VIS are often sloppy and erroneous, not confirming the facts revealed in the trial process and various research studies, not only about MMR vaccine-induced sufferings but also about other vaccine issues.

What is the meaning of this situation? We will analyze both sides of vaccine discourse to discuss the social phenomenon of vaccines and clarify the meaning of this situation.

4. Analyzing vaccine discourse

In order to analyze the vaccine discourse based on the method above-mentioned, we collected general books that discuss vaccines over the past 30 years ("Table 1" at the end of the paper), and first tried to understand what kind of explanations are being developed in these books. For the sake of convenience, we will refer to these books as "vaccine books". The reason for limiting the list to the past 30 years is due to the availability of vaccine books and the fact that the Immunization Law was amended in 1994 to change mandatory immunization to recommended immunization. This was because policy change that rescinded the obligation to immunize was considered to have had a significant impact on vaccine discourse.

The analytical procedure is to describe the vaccine discourses used in each of the vaccine books and to clarify them in terms of "what they are doing". As Table 1 shows, however, vaccine books are not published in a relatively stable manner in each year, and there is some bias depending on the time of year. We will first indicate some changes in the content of such vaccine books.

4.1. Increase of Vaccine-Discourse Production in Recent Year

Referring to the publication years in Table 1, the first major change can be seen in the sharp increase in the number of publications after 2021. In other words, vaccine-discourse production has flourished since 2021. As can be observed from the titles of the vaccine books, this indicates an increase in vaccine-discourse production at a time when the new coronavirus vaccine was approved and produced and would soon be available for vaccination. Of the 60 books on the list, 36 were published after this time, which means that more than half of the vaccine discourses in the past 30 years were related to the new coronavirus vaccine.

Another feature is that half of the vaccine books from 2015 to 2020 are related to the HPV vaccine (It is called as "cervical cancer vaccine" in Japan). Fourteen vaccine books are found from 2015 to 2020, of which 7 are related to the HPV vaccine.

As these indicate, it can be observed that a large part of the vaccine discourses of the last 30 years are related to HPV and new coronavirus vaccines, accounting for two thirds of the total in the current list.

4.2. Categories by the Contents and the Problem of Classification

At first glance, it appears as if there are three main categories of these vaccine books, based on differences in the contents of their arguments. So, let us first mention them.

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(i) Books discussing the safety of vaccines

The first is "books discussing questions about vaccine safety." By "discussing questions about safety," we mean that the authors present issues that raise questions about safety and attempt to resolve those questions by introducing a variety of cases.

For example, No.11 in Table 1, "Don't get the influenza vaccine!" (Mori, 2007 (No.11)), while referring to the effectiveness of the polio vaccine and other effective cases to demonstrate the significance of the vaccine itself, does not address the issue of the effectiveness of the influenza vaccine due to the mutability of the influenza virus. It also discusses the issue of how to indicate the vaccine efficacy rate, the necessity of vaccine production, and the significance of the Maebashi Report (a famous report published in 1987 by the Maebashi City Medical Association on the efficacy of the influenza vaccine), among others. It then argues that influenza vaccination should be a voluntary choice.

In addition, although it is inclined to present the effectiveness of vaccine, "Do Vaccinations 'work'"? (Iwata, 2010 (No.12)) discusses both some historical safety problems on vaccination and the problem of vaccine hesitation, taking into account the historical nature of the Maebashi Report above-mentioned and other factors. The author argues that the cases of vaccine-induced sufferings were political and administrative problems unique to the era when they happened. It also argues that the mentality of the general public introducing the schema of "those inflicting damage" versus "suffering victim" has had a significant impact on the social problematization of vaccine-induced sufferings.

(ii) Books discussing vaccine promotion

Next, "books discussing vaccine promotion" (e.g., Kinoshita, 2021 (No.50); Miyasaka, 2021 (No.48); etc.), discuss the "lack of science" that results in vaccine hesitation, attributing vaccine hesitation to ridiculous conspiracy theories and homeopathy, which is denied by biomedicine, on the one hand, and presenting "scientific evidence for vaccine effectiveness" as shown in various studies on the other. The cases of vaccine-induced sufferings are not dealt with in the context of "medical credibility" or even "drug-induced sufferings" which the actual victims of VIS are oriented toward in their narratives. Rather, the books discuss such sufferings in the context of searching for the reason and problem of vaccine hesitation, such that it was a political issue, or that it caused the problem of infectious potential due to the elimination of mandatory vaccination.

(iii) Books discussing the harmfulness of vaccines

Finally, in the "books discussing the harmfulness of vaccines" (e.g., Kondo, 2017(No.29); 2022 (No.52); Funase, 2014 (No.20); 2021 (No.39); Uchimi, 2018 (No.32)), the authors argue that vaccines are harmful not only because they do not work, but also because they are harmful in themselves, as pointed out through cases of adverse reactions to vaccines, vaccine-induced sufferings. The profits of pharmaceutical companies through the introduction of vaccines, and in some cases, the conspiracies of giant conglomerates that control the entire world behind them, are also often discussed. In other words, while presenting the "historical and international debate over vaccine safety", the "international conspiracy" over vaccines is often discussed.

Based on the above, it would appear at first glance that vaccine discourses can be divided into the above three categories. However, it is necessary to consider whether such categorization is appropriate.

We should consider some problems in describing vaccine discourse by categorizing them according to the content of the discussion. The problem is that the criteria for categorization itself is based on our judgment of the reasonableness of the debate over the efficacy of vaccines.

For example, if one knows the history of VIS, it is possible to judge that the book once categorized as a "books discussing the safety of vaccines" (e.g., Iwata, 2010, abovementioned) should belong to a "books discussing vaccine promotion" that is organized in the direction of placing the efficacy of vaccines at the outcome of the debate. In other words, for example, Iwata (Iwata, 2010 (No.12)) discusses the fact that there were no lawsuits for damages in the diphtheria VIS incident, that the media made a big issue of the perpetrators even though the defendant company was not the only one with poor manufacturing technology at the time, and that the absence of vaccines would have resulted in an even larger number of infected people. However, it was also known in 2010, when the book was written, that the number of diphtheria cases in Japan was already very small and that it was the media's task or even duty to reveal the problem, including those of the perpetrating companies, especially as there were many deaths, and it was reported that the Ministry of Justice's advice to the Ministry of Health led to the avoidance of filing a lawsuit for damages. Those who are familiar with the history of VIS can see the book as an arbitrary organization of arguments to promote vaccines. However, because the detailed history of vaccine-induced sufferings is generally unknown, it is taken as if it were a neutral argument about vaccines, and the text positions itself as such.

It means that when introducing the categorization of vaccine books by their content, the categorizer's knowledge and judgment may control the classification.

4.3. Three Repertoires of Vaccine Discourse

I would like to describe the vaccine discourse not in terms of its content, but rather in terms of the context it forms and what it "does" in such context. As previous studies of discourse analysis have shown, speech itself shapes the issues of the situation from within the context, while indicating the particular moral space and rationality of speech in the context. Similarly, narratives in vaccine books can be thought of as presenting the claims themselves as rational and appropriate, thereby producing the topics they discuss and their associated moralities on the fly (e.g., Wetherell et al., 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

One concrete example is Gilbert and Mulkey's study in science (Gilbert and Mulkey 1984), mentioned earlier. Gilbert and Mulkey interviewed both sides of the controversy over phosphorylation oxidation - the controversy over the chemiosmotic hypothesis and the chemical intermediate hypothesis - and instead of judging one of them to be correct and explaining the situation (which is exactly what the scientists participating in the controversy are doing), they identified the discourse common to both as the "empiricist repertoire" and the "contingent repertoire," and also revealed that the "truth-will-out

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device (TWOD)" is used as a linguistic device to mediate between them. In other words, they revealed the reality of the social phenomenon of science on the subject of oxidative phosphorylation.

The same kind of discursive behavior can be observed in the vaccine books. This is especially true when asymmetrical explanations of the problematic situation related to vaccines are formulated. While the "books discussing vaccine promotion" argue that the main argument is the efficacy of the vaccines' internal performance, and that the problematic situations related to vaccines are not internal to the vaccines, the "books discussing the harmfulness of vaccines" also argue that the main argument is the problematic nature of vaccines, which exists inside of the vaccines, and that the situation that makes vaccines feel effective exists outside of vaccines, namely, manipulating information on vaccination. As such it is observable that they all use similar discursive tools to construct opposed realities.

In the following, therefore, we will present three repertoires that can be identified as vaccine discourses on a careful reading of vaccine books. I coined the terms: 'componentist', 'manipulationist' and 'psychologism' to refer to the repertoires at work.

(i) Componentist Repertoire
Widespread in the vaccine discourse is the discourse that attributes the performance and problems to the vaccine itself. These are what I call "componentist repertoire". These are a set of discourse that reduce a particular practical situation to its components.

For example, in the case of the "books discussing vaccine promotion", the efficacy and benefits are attributed to the components and the inside of the vaccine, while the risks and the problems are more often attributed to the psychological situation of the people who claim such problems, with a few that belong to the vaccine itself such as adverse reactions (they are considered "natural" phenomena).

On the other hand, the widespread tendency in the "books discussing the harmfulness of vaccines" is to attribute the problems of vaccines to vaccines themselves. It goes deeper into the components used in vaccine production (e.g., adjuvants, animal components used in culture, inactivators, preservatives, etc.). In each case, the toxicities are sorted inside the vaccines and those that are detrimental to the claims are sorted outside the vaccines. Furthermore, vaccine-induced sufferings are discussed here as a problem caused by the vaccine itself.

This repertoire is also often found in the "books discussing the safety of vaccines", and is a discourse used when the reader is left to judge the safety of vaccination, with the basis for this judgment being the ingredients (performance) of the vaccine.

(ii) Manipulationist Repertoire
One of the most conspicuous examples of the vaccine discourses is that the problematic situations are established by deliberate manipulation. These are what I call "manipulationist repertoire". These are a set of discourse that shape the reality that a particular problematic situation is caused by some form of manipulation.

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For example, in the "books discussing the harmfulness of vaccines", it is possible to observe a set of discourses that claim that side effects, adverse events, and aftereffects caused by vaccines have been designed by the intentional plan or manipulation of the pharmaceutical companies and the governments and conglomerates that influence such companies. The function of the discourses is a rational explanation. That is, things come into being because someone intentionally designs and manipulates them to do so.

On the other hand, in the "books discussing vaccine promotion", it is possible to observe a set of discourse that the social conditions that cause vaccine hesitation are intentionally created by the mass media that strongly support some victims of VIS or those who experience difficulties with vaccines, or by the government agencies that are influenced by public opinion, or by intentionally created disinformation.

In addition, the "books discussing the safety of vaccines" discuss elements that undermine the safety of vaccination by some profit-driven manipulation of information and pressure by the pharmaceutical companies and by the government agencies that supervise them.

(iii) Psychologism Repertoire
Another widely seen form of vaccine discourse is one that reduces the problematic situation to the psychological condition of the target population, rather than to the components of the vaccine. These are what I call "psychologism repertoire". The problematic situation is discussed by reducing it to the psychological situation of the people related to it.

For example, in the "books discussing vaccine promotion", the effectiveness of vaccination is attributed to the performance (ingredients) of the vaccine itself, while the problems associated with vaccination are not caused by the vaccine but by unintentional and psychological factors of the people associated with it. The problems lie in people's mentality caused by the political situation peculiar to the region, or by ignorance and psychological situations that are influenced by misinformation (including the raison d'etre of mothers who organize movements against some vaccination (Muranaka, 2018 (No.30)).

On the other hand, unintentional and psychological matters that cause willingly vaccinating are mainly discussed as brainwashing by manipulation and misinformation about vaccines in "books discussing the harmfulness of vaccines". Psychological repertoire is rarely used in "books discussing the safety of vaccines".

5. Discussion and Conclusion

One of the characteristics of the vaccine discourse is the similarity between the two groups of books that are at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of content: "books discussing vaccine promotion" and "books discussing the harmfulness of vaccines". Interestingly, it can be observed that the very existence of such a fragmented linguistic network, as well as the discourses used in it, use the same repertoires, even if they are opposite in content.

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As we discussed above, "componentist repertoire" deserves attention. Its characteristic is that each narrative is positive to the content of the claim, creating a form of "there is something inside of the vaccine itself". On the other hand, problematic events that are contradictory to the content of the claim are not within the vaccine itself. Such problems constructed outside of the vaccine are often said to be in people's psychology ("psychologism repertoire"), but that psychology is not seen as natural. It is shown to be manipulated and shaped by the mass media and the government, and by the pharmaceutical companies and the conglomerates that influence them ("manipulationist repertoire "). Let us discuss some features of these repertoires.

5.1. Discussion on Statistics and Ethics

Gilbert and Mulkey identified two types of repertoires in the discourse of chemical scientists, "empiricist repertoire" and "contingent repertoire" as mentioned above. Empiricist repertoire was used to indicate the speaker's version of correct belief and the reason for such correctness. Discourse in the experimental papers is a typical one, but scientists also used it in the course of informal talk. Gilbert and Mulkey pointed out its empirical characteristics of an impersonal natural world. Impersonality is vital.

> Empiricist discourse is organised in a manner which denies its character as an interpretative product and which denies that its author's actions to relevant to its content. (Gilbert and Mulkey 1984: 56)

Componentist repertoire is very similar to it. Vaccine discourse is not only produced in the scientific world. However, vaccine is a type of product that was invented and developed by scientists. It means that the essential features of vaccine are expected to exist inside of the vaccine as a scientific product. Componentist repertoire is repeatedly observable with impersonal statistical data. Sometimes componentist repertoire is exerted with stories of persons of authority and/or authoritative organizations in history or present. A typical example is the institution, such as WHO, CDC and other authoritative institutions and/or some figure. There are several stories attributing remarkable achievements and crucial problems to components of vaccine. However, statistical data is more often utilized, and such impersonality indicates more powerfully a correct belief, even if it accompanies a dilemma concerning vaccination. As mentioned above, such a dilemma is that while not vaccinating increases the likelihood of contracting an infectious disease, vaccinating creates the risk of having to compensate for adverse health reactions (Tezuka, 2010).

What this dilemma calls for is actually and essentially an ethical argument. As discussed by Kozai (Kozai, 2019), it is arguable, as in a traditional Japanese way, that while infectious disease morbidity due to non-vaccination may be a natural fate, the health hazards caused by vaccination are a man-made disaster and must therefore be avoided. However, by reducing the subject to a number in the statistics, the statistical process shapes the discussion, so that infectious diseases and health hazards are discussed at the same level as some vaccine promotion discourse (e.g., Iwata 2010; Kinoshita 2021). In other words, it limits the discussion to a probabilistic comparison. As such, comparability itself is an ethical statement, because it is a statement of opinion that physical problems

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should be treated as similar, regardless of cause. Statistics can obscure or hide them. In this sense, the statistical treatment of the dilemma is both medical and ethical. Componentist repertoire realizes not only the impersonality which constructs expected correctness of belief without any interpretative work, but also the ethical framework in which medical and experimental discussion exert fruitfulness.

5.2. Discussion on the Accounts of False Belief

Gilbert and Mulkey also pointed out that contingent repertoire to indicate incorrect belief and its cause is used much more flexibly and variably (Gilbert and Mulkey 1984: 79). This is because discourse to indicate incorrect belief should be transformed and show flexibility, depending upon the situations and the contexts. It also is observable in vaccine discourse. However, such contingency in vaccine discourse is slightly different from that of the scientific community and more oriented to interests.

That people hold wrong beliefs is not their fault, but rather, because they are ignorant or in a particular psychological situation. However, it is assumed that they are in such ignorance or in a psychological situation because some manipulation has been done to them. Such manipulation is alleged to have been carried out by the mass media, by governments and, in some cases, the mass media and the governments being operated by well-funded corporations and global conglomerates.

The reason why contingent repertoire is vital to indicate incorrect belief is because it resolves interpretative dilemma:

> [t]he introduction of the contingent repertoire resolves the speaker's interpretative dilemma by showing that the speech of those in error, although it is not fully scientific, is easily understood in view of 'what we all know about' the typical limitations of scientists as fallible human beings. (Gilbert and Mulkey 1984: 69-70)

It is also similar to manipulationist repertoire and psychologism repertoire. There seem to be two points in understanding these repertoires. One is solving a dilemma. These repertoires do not attribute any responsibility to people who have incorrect belief in vaccines, while people should be rectified and converted. Another point is understandability. Accounts of false belief are not only organized in a way which explains the reasons for false belief by linking it to something outside of vaccine, but also indicate probability and understandability. Such probability and understandability often consist of political and economic interests, based on general didactic stories.

5.3. Discussion on the relationship between Vaccine Discourse and VIS

The social situations surrounding vaccine discourse in Japan have been somewhat different from those of other countries, because vaccine-induced sufferings are officially recognized in Japan. VIS, as with drug-induced sufferings, helps us to understand vaccine and medicine as a social entity, because victims have shown us their social sufferings and the difficulties they have experienced, caused by vaccination and medicine. Their suffering reflects the features of vaccines and helps us to consider the "social phenomenon of vaccines".

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One such difference that can be addressed here is the relationship between vaccine discourse and VIS discourse, discussed in the section 3.1. This is because VIS is a real and crucial experience of suffering, and such a feature of VIS highlights some characteristics of vaccine discourse.

This is not to point out, however, that one is experience and the other discourse. In that sense, VIS discourse, such as the testimony we read above, is also a discourse. Rather, we are pointing out that what makes the vaccine discourse possible is that in both cases the effects and the problematic nature of the component are not being described as an experience. This is an interesting feature of vaccine discourse. For the impossibility of directly experiencing the effects of vaccines is the significant part of what a vaccine is. This, in turn, creates a form of vaccine discourse in relation to social and normative forms of reasoning.

It is precisely for this reason that the VIS discourse is not substituted by most of the vaccine discourse. This is because VIS are shaped as experiential. The experiential feature of VIS is vital. As noted in the previous analysis of the narrative (Extract 01), VIS discourse does not only point out the problematic nature of vaccine safety. It has a very distinctive form to solving a type of dilemma, with a reference to norms specific to the situation, in which the lively physical disability of the victim is not denied, whilst at the same time, the causes of the disability are problematized. In this sense, the direct reference to the suffering experience is what makes VIS discourse unique. It is quite contrary to vaccine discourse. There is a dilemma that the Japanese vaccine discourse has to solve, with reference to VIS. That is why the meaning and the context of VIS has often been distorted in vaccine discourse in Japan.

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5.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, inspired by the Strong Program by Bloor and referring to Gilbert and Mulkey's discourse analysis of the scientific controversy, I have identified three kinds of repertoires, "componentist repertoire", "manipulationist repertoire" and "psychologism repertoire" in the recent vaccine discourse in Japan. These repertoires are vital in understanding what the vaccine discourse does in contemporary Japanese society. I have discussed the features of the "social phenomenon of vaccines" by examining the relationship among these repertoires and how these repertoires work. When discussing vaccine hesitation, the causes of such hesitation are often attributed to political situations or biased information by the mass media. However, as Colgrove (Colgrove, 2006) and Kozai (Kozai, 2019; 2020) argue, conflicts over vaccines, including vaccine hesitation, are parts of the "social phenomenon of vaccines". It is not necessarily due to a lack of information among people or a lack of education among people. Rather, it is deeply connected to the impossibility of directly experiencing the effects of vaccines. Medical and ethical statements are brought into the debate about vaccine efficacy and vaccine hesitation, resulting in obscuring reasons underlying vaccine hesitation.

It means that there is a certain irony here. The safer vaccines become, the more vaccine discourse can be produced. VIS discourse consists of linking vaccines to experiences. While improved vaccines and vaccination processes become safer, the production of VIS

discourses decreases. It will also enable the production of vaccine discourses. This is because the impossibility of direct experience of vaccine effects is becoming more and more widespread.

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Table 1

No	Title	Subtitle	Author	Publisher	Year
1	Caution! Vaccination.	What every parent needs to know, message from the UK	Leon Chaitow	Nousangyoson Bunka Kyokai	1992
2	Is the vaccine safe?	–	Masami Kurokawa	Ootsuki Shoten	1993
3	Murder by Injection	The medical conspiracy against America	Eustace Clarence Mullins, Jr.	Omokagebashi Shuppan	1997
4	The strategy book for"Immunization and Children's Health"	–	Taneki Mouri	Japanmanisist	1997
5	Confessions of a Medical Heretic	–	Robert S. Mendelsohn	Soushisha	1999
6	How are you doing with vaccinations?	You have to know! Various behind-the-scenes information!	Fukui Breastfeeding Consultation Office	Mebaesha	1999
7	Give me back their lives.	Tokai Vaccination Disaster Lawsuit	Association for Tokai Vaccination Disaster Lawsuit	Association for Tokai Vaccination Disaster Lawsuit	2000
8	Iatrogenic disease	"Medical faith" is creating disease.	Makoto Kondo	Kodansha	2000
9	Influenza Vaccine and Medication that You Can't Ask Your Doctor About	–	Keiko Mori	Japanmanisist	2004
10	Before Going for Vaccinations	Put yourself on the side of the child	Keiko Mori and Taneki Mouri	Japanmanisist	2004
11	Don't get the influenza vaccine!	–	Keiko Mori	Futabasha	2007
12	Do vaccinations "work"?	Think about vaccine haters.	Kentaro Iwata	Kobunsha	2010
13	Before Going for Vaccinations, again	–	Editorial Committiee on "Before Going for Vaccinations, again"	Japanmanisist	2011

No	Title	Subtitle	Author	Publisher	Year
14	This is the reality of the murderous medical hare!	One-world rulers who take life and take money at the same time	Shunsuke Funase and Benjamin Fulford	Hikarurand	2013
15	Non-essential medicine	Unnecessary 90% medical care and the fraud of medical authority	Satoshi Uchimi	Sangonkan	2013
16	Medical treatment for murder	Mafia-controlled modern medical system	Benjamin Fulford	Bestsellers	2013
17	Immunization has side effects and disadvantages, so you can choose to be vaccinated.	–	Makoto Yamada	Japanmanisist	2013
18	Mystery of "secret societies" so interesting that you can't sleep	The more you know, the more shocking it is!, KKK, Illuminati and etc.	Shin-ichiro Namiki	Mikasa Shobo	2013
19	We've all talked about cases where we've had trouble with vaccines.	Immunization Practices Learned by the Case	Nozomu Takeshita et al.	Nanzando	2014
20	The Vaccine Trap	Not only ineffective, but super harmful!	Shunsuke Funase	East Press	2014
21	Cervical cancer vaccine case	–	Takao Saito	Shueisha	2015
22	New Version "Before Going for Vaccinations"	–	Vaccine Talk Nationwide	Japanmanisist	2015
23	Medications are killing people.	Toxic effects and detoxification recommendations	Satoshi Uchimi	Take Shobo	2015
24	The New Drug Trap: Cervical Cancer, Dementia...The 10 Trillion Yen Dark Side	–	Toru Toridamari	Bungei Shunju	2015
25	Cervical Cancer Vaccine, Girls and Their Mothers Fighting Adverse Reactions	–	Shoko Kurokawa	Shueisha	2015

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No	Title	Subtitle	Author	Publisher	Year
26	Have you heard the voices of vaccine-damaged families?	–	Noriko Aono	Japanmanisist	2016
27	Pediatricians don't give drugs to their own children.	I'll tell you the drugs you don't need, the vaccines you don't need.	Kayoko Toriumi	Makino Shuppan	2016
28	Sacrificial Girls	Tracing the Dark Side of Cervical Cancer Vaccination Damage	Yoshiyasu Inoue	Gendai Shokan	2017
29	Fear of vaccine side effects	–	Makoto Kondo	Bungei Shunju	2017
30	100,000 uteri	Is that severe cramping a side reaction to HPV vaccine?	Riko Muranaka	Heibonsha	2018
31	Why do the vaccine-induced sufferings happen?	Cervical cancer vaccine was a "genetically modified" drug	Rei Sakanoue et al.	Hikarurand	2018
32	Non-essential vaccine	Some important information to know now	Satoshi Uchimi	Sangokan Shinsha	2018
33	Deadly Choices	How the Anti-Vaccine Movement Threatens Us All	Paul Offit	Chijinshokan	2018
34	Viruses have a history of "scattering".	Covid-19 is the same! The Backside of the Vaccine Business	Seiji Kikukawa	Hikarurand	2020
35	Covid-19 and Vaccine	The Truth Behind the New Virus Riots and the Real Aim of Vaccines	Shunsuke Funase	Kyoei Shobo	2021
36	The whole story of Covid-19 and vaccines	–	Yoshinori Kobayashi and Masayasu Inoue	Shogakukan	2021
37	Would you give a third dose of the corona vaccine? Why I, a doctor, don't vaccinate	–	Mitsugu Shiga	Gentosha	2021

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No	Title	Subtitle	Author	Publisher	Year
38	Destroying the Corona Vaccine Illusion	One could have cured oneself in 3 days of sleep!	Masayasu Inoue and Rei Sakanoue	Hikarurand	2021
39	The vaccine will kill you	–	Shunsuke Funase	Kyoei Shobo	2021
40	Stuck	How Vaccine Rumors Start and Why They Don't Go Away	Heidi J. Larson	Misuzu Shobo	2021
41	Covid-19 and Vaccines as Medical Killing	–	Akio Asuka et al.	Hikarurand	2021
42	Now you need to know! The Truth About Vaccines	From the ABCs of Immunization to the New Corona Vaccine	Hiroyuki Sakitani	Shuwa Shistemu	2021
43	New Corona and Vaccines. Were We Right?	–	Mine Soutaro and Hiroyuki Yamanaka	Nikkei BP	2021
44	New Corona Vaccine, the "Truth" No One Told	–	Toru Toridamari	Takarajimasha	2021
45	New Corona Vaccine, Who Gets Side Effects and Who Doesn't	–	Makoto Kondo	Shogakukan	2021
46	New Coronavirus Vaccine	Overcoming Pandemics with Gene Vaccines	Masanobu Sugimoto	Tokyo Kagaku Dojin	2021
47	New Coronavirus Vaccine	Its Real Image and Problems	Keisuke Amagasa	Ryokuhu Shuppan	2021
48	New Corona Vaccine, the Real "Truth"	–	Masayuki Miyasaka	Kodansha	2021
49	People may be happier not knowing about the horrors of the corona vaccine	–	Toku Takahashi et al.	Seiko Shobo	2021
50	Let's all know! Important Talk about the New Corona Vaccine and HPV Vaccine	–	Takahiro Kinoshita	Wani books	2021
51	The Swine Flu Affair	Decision-Making on a Slippery Disease	Richard E. Neustadt and Harvey V. Fineberg	Fujiwara Shoten	2021

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No	Title	Subtitle	Author	Publisher	Year
52	The Truth About Zero Adverse Deaths	What we know so far about the future of "With Corona"	Makoto Kondo	Bijinesusha	2022
53	Why the corona vaccine is dangerous	Immunologist's Warning	Hiroshi Arakawa	Kyoei Shobo	2022
54	Vaccine Boundaries	Dynamics of Power and Ethics	Katsuhiko Kokubu	Seiunsha	2022
55	Why the corona vaccine is dangerous 2	Immunologist's Warning	Hiroshi Arakawa	Kadensha	2023
56	Dissolving Illusions	Disease, Vaccines, and the Forgotten History	Roman Bystrianyk and Suzanne Humphries	Hikarurand	2023
57	Coming of a post vaccine-after-effect society	–	Katsuhiko Fukuda	Hikarurand	2023
58	The Corona Vaccine that Deceived the World	–	Toru Toridamari et al.	Takarajimasha	2023
59	Plague of Corruption	Restoring Faith in the Promise of Science	Kent Heckenlively and Judy Mikovits	Gentosha	2023
60	Vaccine-induced Sufferings by New Coronavirus Vaccine	–	Toru Toridamari	Bukkumansha	2023

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Online discourse of vaccine hesitancy: discussions of COVID-19 vaccination in Russian-language social media

Victoria Dudina[1], Viktoriia Saifulina[2]

Abstract

Doubts about vaccination in spite of the availability of vaccines are called "vaccine hesitancy". In the digital age vaccine hesitancy is significantly influenced by information from the Internet, online communication and discussions on social media. The research of the language of such discussion is very important for understanding attitudes of people towards vaccination. The vaccine hesitancy discourse varies from country to country due to its social context, but also has many similarities. The aim of the research was to describe the thematic structure of the online discourse of vaccine hesitancy in social media. We analyzed Russian language social media discussions around COVID-19 vaccination. Comments were selected from four most active discussion groups. Thematic analysis was implemented for data organization and interpretation. Main themes identified are as follows: doubts about the safety of vaccination; doubts about the effectiveness of vaccination; doubts about the need for vaccination; doubts about the fairness of vaccination. The study of discourses of vaccine hesitancy in different languages makes a significant contribution to understanding the general patterns of functioning of discourse in the field of health, in particular, discourse about vaccination. The research was supported by RSF (project No 22-18-00261).

Keywords

Discourse, social media, vaccine hesitancy, thematic analysis, COVID-19

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Introduction

In 2012, at the initiative of the World Health Organization, a working group was established within the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) to study vaccine hesitancy. After reviewing available data and research, the SAGE Working Group defined vaccine hesitancy as delaying the decision to accept or refuse a vaccine despite the availability of vaccination services (MacDonald et al., 2015). World Health Organization called vaccine hesitancy, the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines, as one in the top ten threats to global health (World Health Organization, 2019). Vaccine hesitancy has attracted increasing attention from researchers in different countries in recent years, and COVID-19 has contributed to the urgency of research on this issue.

The research on vaccination and attitudes toward it has become particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Cordina, Lauri, 2021; Paul, Steptoe, Fancourt, 2021; Al-Jayyousi et al., 2021). Numerous media reports on attitudes toward vaccination tend to frame decisions regarding vaccination in pro or con terms (Zimand-Sheiner et al., 2021). But decisions about vaccination typically fall in the middle of these extremes. Many people, whether they are supporters or opponents of vaccination, have some doubts about the advisability and safety of vaccination for themselves, despite the availability of the vaccine, that is experience "vaccine hesitancy". Vaccine hesitancy considered a substantial global health risk. Understanding the factors influencing COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy is essential to improve the effectiveness of vaccination programs (Kafadar et al., 2023).

Decision-making regarding health, treatment, and prevention in the contemporary world is significantly influenced by information from the Internet and discussions on social media. Research shows that discussions on social media can influence decisions regarding vaccination (Samal, 2021). Thus, studies have shown that parents who decide not to vaccinate their children tend to form their opinion after reading online information on this topic, while most people are not interested in the degree of reliability of the source of information (Opel et al., 2011). Those who refuse vaccination more often use the Internet to search for information about vaccinations and trust information from specialists and medical institutions to a lesser extent. Research (Betsch et al., 2010; Nan, Madden, 2012) demonstrates that visiting vaccine-related websites and blogs negatively influences the intention to vaccinate. By comparing perceptions of vaccine risks among those who visited control websites (containing neutral facts without negative ratings or opinions) and websites dedicated to criticizing vaccines, the researchers found that even brief exposure to information on critical websites increased overall perception of the risk of vaccination compared with the outcome of visiting control websites. Another study concluded that the use of Twitter and Facebook as sources of health information and knowledge about influenza had a significant inverse relationship with influenza vaccine uptake (Ahmed et al., 2018).

Vaccine hesitancy in the digitized world is closely related to online communication. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when restrictions on social interaction and self-isolation have become part of everyday life, the role of Internet communication has increased significantly. Social media have become a platform for covering news on the spread of COVID-19 and for discussing measures taken to contain the pandemic, in particular,

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vaccination. Such discussions, on the one hand, reflect basic public sentiment, and on the other, have a formative impact on the opinions of participants in Internet communications. Understanding the discourse of vaccine hesitancy is impossible without studying the structure and characteristics of discussions on vaccination on social networks.

The vaccine hesitancy discourse varies from country to country due to its social context, but also has many similarities. We believe that the study of discourses of vaccine hesitancy makes a significant contribution to understanding the general patterns of healthcare discourse.

The practice of searching for health information on the Internet is widespread among Russians (Dudina, Ruppel, 2020). Relatively low level of institutional trust in general (Veselov et al., 2016) and, in particular, in medical institutions pushes some people to discuss the most disturbing health problems on social media. Multiple Russian-language online communities and chats contain discussions on health-related topics. Since the beginning of vaccination against Covid, extensive discussions about vaccination have taken place on Russian-language social networks.

Russia registered the first vaccine against COVID in August, 2020. The federal government announced plans to begin a mass vaccination campaign at the end of 2020, despite concerns that the vaccine had not yet been tested in clinical trials. Disagreement over COVID statistics and concerns about the rush to approve a vaccine have created a climate of public mistrust (King, Dudina, 2021) which had a negative influence on the readiness of people to be vaccinated. It should be noted that imported vaccines were not available in Russia due to legal restrictions on their use. Although the first Russian COVID-19 vaccine, Sputnik V, was later approved for emergency use in several other countries, such as Argentina, Belarus, Serbia and the United Arab Emirates, there has been much discussion about the safety and side effects of the vaccine. At the same time, the vaccination discourse has been highly politicized from the very beginning.

Recent research shows that online discussions about vaccines and vaccination among Russian Internet users cover a wide range of issues (Platonov, Svetlov, Saifulina, 2022). But so far, vaccine hesitancy in the Russian-language social media has been practically unstudied.The aim of the research was to analyze and describe the thematic structure of the discourse of vaccine hesitancy in Russian-language social media. In this article, we will consider approaches to the study of vaccine hesitancy and describe the main themes that make up the online discourse of vaccine hesitancy on analyzed social media.

1. Vaccine hesitancy: studies and concepts

Vaccine hesitancy is demonstrated both by people who simply forget about vaccination or put it off, and by those who actively oppose vaccination. Vaccine hesitancy is complex and contextual. The main determinants of vaccine hesitancy can be defined as complacency, inconvenience, and lack of confidence (MacDonald et al., 2015).

Health complacency suggests that if an individual's perceived risk of a vaccine-preventable disease is low, then vaccination is not considered a necessary preventative measure. The impact of a given determinant may increase if other life priorities seem more important than health, or if illness is not perceived as a threat by the individual. Self-esteem and a person's actual ability to take action to get vaccinated may also influence this factor.

Inconvenience as a determinant of vaccine hesitancy involves the following manifestations: physical inability to access the vaccine, financial inaccessibility of the vaccine or unwillingness to pay, geographic inaccessibility, and low quality of vaccination services. Even if there is a positive intention to get vaccinated, structural barriers such as difficult access may discourage a person from deciding to get vaccinated.

The determinant of lack of confidence is more complex. It includes the following characteristics: uncertainty about the effectiveness and safety of vaccines; lack of trust in the system that provides the vaccination procedure (including uncertainty about the reliability and competence of medical services and health professionals); unconvincing arguments and rhetoric from politicians making decisions about the need for vaccines. Lack of trust can also lead to reluctance to get vaccinated.

The SAGE Vaccine Hesitancy Working Group has broken down the above determinants into 3 factors that determine vaccine hesitancy:
- contextual influence: factors determined by the historical, sociocultural, environmental context, institutional features of the health care system, politics, and economics;
- individual and group influence: factors due to personal perception of the vaccine or the influence of the social environment;
- factors directly related to the characteristics of the vaccine or the vaccination process itself (MacDonald et al., 2015).

Research shows that vaccine hesitancy in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has become a pressing issue that is more related to contextual factors than psychological characteristics. Researchers in Austria have identified several important factors in vaccine hesitancy, ranging from demographic characteristics to more complex factors such as voting behavior and trust in government (Schernhammer et al., 2022). Among those who have doubts about the COVID-19 vaccine, those who voted for opposition parties or did not vote at all were 2.3 times more likely than those who voted for the ruling parties. Only 46.2% trusted the Austrian government to provide safe vaccines, and 80.7% sought independent scientific assessments of vaccine safety to make vaccination decisions. Contrary to expectations, psychosocial aspects were only weakly correlated with vaccine hesitancy. However, according to the study, the strong correlation between vaccine hesitancy and mistrust of authorities suggests a common cause of opposition to vaccination promotion in society.

The above factors contribute to vaccine hesitancy. Vaccine hesitancy is an unsustainable position. Consultations with doctors, searching for information on the Internet, and discussions on social media influence an individual opinion and can sway it towards even greater hesitancy or, on the contrary, acceptance of the vaccine. That is why, to

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better understand the causes of vaccine hesitancy and build an effective communication strategy, it is important to find out what topics appear in online discussions, what ideas about vaccination they form, which ideas are the most stable, and which are potentially more susceptible to change.

Research on online communication around vaccination issues can be divided into several areas. The first one is mapping discussions on social networks to determine patterns of information dissemination, key actors, and their audiences (Martin et al., 2020). Another one is focused on sentiment analysis of posts and messages posted on social networks (Piedrahita-Valdés et al., 2021). Researchers from the University of Toronto studied topics that arose in user posts on Twitter during the period of vaccination of the population against COVID-19 with Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines (Griffith, Marani, Monkman, 2021). As a result of a content analysis of users' posts, it was found that vaccine hesitancy is expressed in the following topics: safety concerns; suspicions regarding the political and economic forces driving the COVID-19 pandemic or vaccine development; lack of knowledge about the vaccine; anti-vaccine or conflicting messages from officials; no possible legal liability for vaccine manufacturers.

Australian researcher (Aechtner, 2021) conducted a content analysis of the online community "Australian Vaccination-risks Network," which has a reputation for being anti-vaccine. The study found that the main method used by the anti-vaccine communities to communicate with their audience is to refer to the dangers of the vaccine and rhetoric about the impact of pharmaceutical companies on the market. In messages from such communities, one can also often observe themes of obtaining material benefits from vaccination.

Social science researchers view health communication on social media as a tool for shaping attitudes toward vaccination. The works mentioned identify the topics that appear in such discussions: they concern not only health concerns, but also politics, ideological beliefs, and conspiracy theories.

2. Vaccine hesitancy discourse through the prism of social representations

To study the discourse of vaccine hesitancy, we adapted an approach developed in the theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1973; Moscovici, 1992). The value of this approach in health behavior research, including vaccination, is that it treats lay beliefs not as disparate and unrelated prejudices, but takes into account the own logic of representations and their integrity, conditioned by a specific social context. The online discourse that has developed around the pandemic and vaccination includes a set of concepts and topics that systematically arise in online communication and form a set of social representations about vaccination (Nerlich, Jaspal, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought vaccine hesitancy to the forefront of public discourse. The pandemic has increased awareness of the importance of vaccination, but has also increased mistrust and misinformation. The COVID-19 vaccination campaign has highlighted global disparities in access to

vaccines and has made it important to discuss equitable access to vaccines. The discourse of epidemiologists from a specific professional field has spread into everyday language. The speech of lay people included such special professional terms as herd immunity, antibody titre, clinical trial and so on (Brennan et al., 2022). In our research, we consider the discourse of vaccine hesitancy as an environment for the formation, change and maintenance of social representations about vaccination.

Serge Moscovici described social representations as a system of values, ideas and practices with a dual function: to establish an order that will allow people to navigate and manage the material and social world, and also to ensure communication between members of the community, providing them with codes for social exchange, designation and unambiguous classification of various aspects of their world (Moscovici, Herzlich 1973). Social representations organize reality and contribute to its knowledge and ordering (Moscovici, 2000; Moscovici, 2001). The coronavirus pandemic is a "stress point", i.e. an event in which new social representations are formed. The source of social representations is knowledge and concepts circulating in discourse, the form of which changes depending on individual experiences, interests and beliefs (Potter, Edwards, 1999).

The structure of social representations consists of central and peripheral themes and concepts. Central concepts form the unchanging basis of discourse, while peripheral concepts are mobile elements prone to change (Abric, 1993). Therefore, it is expected that the central concepts shaping the vaccine hesitancy discourse will be more or less similar across all identified topics, while the peripheral ones will differ. Peripheral concepts act as grids for deciphering the situation and as indicators of the "normality" of what is happening. Peripheral elements have a lesser degree of abstraction than elements of the central core. In the case of an "abnormal" situation, when certain phenomena contradict basic ideas, the protective role of peripheral elements is activated, preserving the core from transformation. Transformation of the central core occurs when a sufficient amount of contradictory information accumulates that exceeds the range of flexibility of the peripheral elements. When studying the digital discourse of vaccine hesitancy, we need to trace which concepts form the core of ideas about vaccination, and which can be classified as peripheral elements.

Based on a preliminary review of the literature on vaccine hesitancy and consideration of the concept of social representations, we formulated a conceptual framework of the discourse structure of vaccine hesitancy that formed the basis of the empirical study. The core of discourse can be formed by one or several elements; it is the most stable element that resists change, which influences the meaning of other elements of discourse and determines the nature of the connections between them. Peripheral elements perform the function of protecting the central core, have greater flexibility for change and are less important for the stability of social representations. A discourse formed around the problem of vaccination contains classification schemes, descriptions, explanations and actions. The discourse of vaccine hesitancy should contain a set of ideas that allow one to classify events and phenomena related to vaccination, describe their properties, and offer typical explanations; in addition, the discourse should contain a series of examples, formulas, clichés illustrating basic statements, values, and corresponding action models.

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3. Research methods

We collected empirical data according to the following research questions:

What topics make up the content of online discourse of vaccine hesitancy?

What beliefs about vaccination that contribute to vaccine hesitancy are being developed in online discussions?

What concepts make up the core and periphery of online discourse of vaccine hesitancy?

A multi-stage selection process was carried out to select relevant comments in the largest Russian-language social network "VKontakte". This network contains both individual profiles and online discussion groups and communities on many topics including health issues. Despite the strengthening of government control over social networking services in Russia, users in thematic groups have the opportunity to openly discuss very controversial topics. Although the network VKontakte requires users to register by phone number, users have some options to post their comments anonymously if they need to hide their identity. They may post on behalf of a group, block public access to a personal profile, or provide very little personal information, making it difficult to identify the real person (Dudina, Judina, Platonov, 2019). In the first stage, we selected four online news communities. Communities were selected according to the following criteria: the number of community members exceeding 350 thousand users; community posts being open for comments; and communities belonging to different thematic areas. The thematic focus was assessed based on the description of the community posted by its administrators. In the second stage, we selected relevant comments. Comments were selected using the VKontakte API. All posts on the community wall for the period from January 18, 2021, to February 15, 2022, were obtained. The choice of the starting date is because the start of mass vaccination in the Russian Federation was announced on January 18, 2021. Then, from the resulting population, posts containing references to vaccination against coronavirus were selected. This filtering was carried out through a search for words with the same root as the word "vaccination". Next, all comments to such posts were downloaded. Thus, 10,056 comments were received that contained mention of COVID vaccination. The mention of vaccination in comments was determined by words with the same root, as was the case with the selection of posts. Then, from the total number of comments for each community, 1,500 comments were selected using a random string request in the DBrowser program. As a result, a final sample of 6,000 comments was formed from the general array, containing the text of the comment, date of publication, and information about the source (community ID).

Coding was conducted following Clarke and Braun's six-step thematic analysis methodology (Clarke, Braun, 2015). As a result of coding, deductive and inductive codes were identified, which were grouped into 24 categories. From the resulting categories, the core themes were then formulated to form the core of online discourse on vaccine hesitancy. To determine which concepts are central and which are peripheral, the frequency of mention of concepts was calculated using the word cloud package in the RStudio

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program. Analysis of the concepts included in each topic made it possible to determine the composition of the central core and peripheral system of each thematic group.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results

The categories identified as a result of coding and analysis of selected comments were divided into two large subgroups: reasoned doubts about vaccination (78.5% of messages) and unreasoned judgments regarding vaccination (21.5% of messages). The subgroup "Reasonable doubts about vaccination" included statements in which users substantiated their opinions and mentioned specific reasons for their doubts. This justification may consist of references to specific examples, personal experience, media reports, or scientific publications. The subgroup "Unreasoned judgments regarding vaccination" includes emotionally loaded statements (humor, insults, regrets, etc.) that are not justified by any reasons for doubts about vaccination and questions about vaccination. Categories generated from coded comments are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories generated from coded comments. .

№ п/п	Categories	Share of comments, %
	Reasoned doubts about vaccination (78,5%)	
1	Mistrust of authorities	20,41
2	Doubts about the effectiveness of vaccination	9,80
3	Doubts about the safety of vaccination	9,17
4	Conflicting messages from government officials and the medical community	7,82
5	Lack of knowledge and information about the vaccine	7,01
6	Compulsory vaccination	5,85
7	Inconsistent government policy	3,87
8	Conspiracy theories	3,78
9	Doubts about the qualifications of those responsible for vaccination	3,78
10	Poor conditions for vaccination	3,24
11	Conflicting information disseminated in the mass media	1,98
12	No possible legal liability for the consequences of vaccination	1,26
13	Lack of recognition of the vaccine by the WHO	0,45
14	Vaccination is contrary to religious beliefs	0,09

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№ п/п	Categories	Share of comments, %
	Unreasoned judgments (21,5%)	
15	Insulting and ridiculing anti-vaxxers	5,16
16	Humor about vaccination and vaccines	4,07
17	Emotional appeals to get vaccinated	3,35
18	Insulting and ridiculing those vaccinated people	3,17
19	Declarative refusal to vaccinate	2,87
20	Vaccination in other countries as a model	0,99
21	Priority to more pressing social issues than coronavirus	0,90
22	Questions about vaccination	0,45
23	Vaccination policy in the Soviet Union as a model for vaccination	0,45
24	Regrets about a previous decision to vaccinate	0,09

Analysis of the semantic content of the identified categories, their frequency of occurrence, and the concepts they contain allowed us to identify four main themes in the online discourse of vaccine hesitancy: doubts about the safety of vaccination; doubts about the effectiveness of vaccination; doubts about the need for vaccination; doubts about the fairness of vaccination. These topics are substantiated through a set of peripheral concepts that serve to reinforce the arguments expressed and at the same time go beyond the direct discussion of the properties, features, and possible effects of vaccination.

The theme "doubts about the safety of vaccination" portrays vaccination as an unsafe act with unknown consequences. This theme is embedded within a broader discourse of risk. Doubts about vaccination are associated primarily with awareness of possible health risks. The theme is built around the discussion of vaccination as a measure that could lead to more negative than positive health consequences. Doubts about the safety of the vaccine for health and discussion of possible risks form the core of this topic.

On the periphery of this theme are discussions of the lack of reliable knowledge about the vaccine, lack of legal responsibility for the consequences of vaccination, contradictory rhetoric from officials, poor vaccination conditions, doubts about the qualifications of medical workers, and suspicions of non-compliance with vaccine production conditions (concerns about the safety and quality of vaccine production, including the possibility of contamination or errors during production).

The theme "doubts about the effectiveness of vaccination" is built around such concepts as "consequences", "effect", and "result". The leitmotif of discussions about the questionable effectiveness of the vaccine is the comparison of the possible consequences of vaccination with the role of the vaccine in preventing the disease. As part of such discussions, users actively give examples of people who "were vaccinated but got sick" or "weren't vaccinated and didn't get sick."

Peripheral subtopics include discussions of conflicting messages from the media, politicians, and medical experts about the effectiveness of vaccination; and discussion of the lack of recognition of the Russian vaccine "Sputnik" by the WHO. These doubts appeal to a general understanding of the impact of vaccination, to arguments about the insufficient study and testing of the effectiveness of the coronavirus vaccine and its too rapid production in the Russian Federation, to the specific conditions of production of the coronavirus vaccine.

The theme "doubts about the need for vaccination" is formed around the idea of vaccination as an unnecessary measure, since the significance of the disease itself is called into question. In these discussions, vaccination is interpreted as an unnecessary measure, and coronavirus as a disease that does not pose a great danger or mutates so quickly that the vaccine cannot resist it. Within the framework of this topic, personal examples are given of cases of people who encountered infected people and did not get sick; users often appeal to personal experience. Concepts such as "meaning," "immunity," and "mutation" play an important role in discussions within this theme.

Peripheral aspects of this theme include discussion of conflicting information disseminated by the mass media regarding the danger and severity of COVID-19; providing personal examples of encountering the virus without serious health consequences; the suspicion is that the authorities and elites exaggerate the danger of the disease for their interests. Also, within the framework of this theme, such an aspect as the priority of more pressing social and economic problems than coronavirus is discussed.

The theme "doubts about the fairness of vaccination" portrays vaccination as the product of a conspiracy by political elites or a "global conspiracy" aimed at obtaining material gain, establishing digital control, and reducing the population. The basic concepts most often found in discussions of this topic are "profit", "management", "collusion", "coercion", and "rights". This group of ideas is formed from subtopics that discuss mistrust of the authorities, inconsistency of state policies, conflicting messages from officials, and forced vaccination. The keynote of this topic is that vaccination in the form in which it is carried out is considered not just as a risk to individual health, but as harm to the population as a whole since vaccination companies primarily have political and economic interests. Vaccination is viewed as questionable because it is based on the selfish motives of vaccine manufacturers, and vaccine production and distribution are driven by profit interests that have little to do with concern for public health. The idea of vaccination as part of an unfair state policy, which is implemented by the authorities to limit the civil rights and freedoms, is also present in discussions related to this thematic group.

Peripheral concepts that underpin the core doubts relate to concerns that political and economic interests involved in the production of a vaccine could negatively affect its quality, as well as influence the exaggeration of its effectiveness and necessity. It can be noted that this topic resonates with the basic ideas of anti-vaccine discourse, which often appeals to conspiracy theories.

In the structure of all the identified themes, there is a connection between categories of trust, knowledge, and power. These categories form the discourse of each theme, forming

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an overall meaning with certain nuances. These key categories suggest that vaccine hesitancy discourse is based on broader social issues that are closely related to each other, such as lack of trust in social institutions, skepticism towards government measures, lack of reliable knowledge about the properties of vaccines and vaccination side effects, and mistrust of medical knowledge in general.

Online discussions about coronavirus vaccination are highly politicized. Most of the identified categories are somehow related to politics. The most frequently discussed category in the context of reluctance to get vaccinated was mistrust of authorities – such discussions accounted for 20.41% of all comments. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer study, in 2020 Russia was recognized as the country with the lowest overall indicator of trust in government institutions, media, and business among the countries examined. Mistrust of authorities was expressed in comments in different ways, from simply declaring mistrust to expressing suspicions that the authorities are trying to profit from the pandemic and vaccination of the population, and interpreting vaccination as the result of a collusion between the state and pharmaceutical companies. Here is an example of such a comment: "There is confidence that they will not do anything for people, just to make money once again and make money either on vaccines or on masks...". Being a complex concept, trust consists of both affective, related to emotions and personal attitudes, and rational components. One of the components of trust is the correspondence of expected actions to real ones.

Another aspect of vaccine hesitancy in online discourse relates to categories capturing doubts about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine (18.97%) and lack of information and knowledge about the vaccine (7.01%). Doubts are expressed in judgments about the uselessness of vaccination, since "the virus mutates." The lack of information is often compensated by personal spontaneous experiments and everyday observations, when users, to support their point of view, appeal to their own "statistics": "Personal observations of deaths in my environment: because of Covid – 1 since 2019, and after vaccination – 11 in the last 7 months."

It should be noted that abstract doubts regarding vaccination in the analyzed comments prevail over concerns related, for example, to poor conditions for vaccination, which are mentioned in only 3.24% of the analyzed comments. Poor conditions mean both insufficient technical equipment of medical institutions and the impossibility of choosing a vaccine. Low qualifications of persons and institutions responsible for vaccination are noted in 3.78% of comments. The lack of legal liability for the consequences of vaccination is also sometimes mentioned (1.26%). Doubts regarding the conditions of vaccination, the qualifications of medical personnel and their responsibility are more specific than statements about the inability to trust the existing authorities or medicine in general. At the same time, abstract concerns, not supported by facts or observations, prevailed in the analyzed texts. Thus, the discourse of vaccine hesitancy, presented in the analyzed comments, appears to be tied to complex issues of the organization of political power, the interests of elites and pharmaceutical companies, as well as problems of trust in medical knowledge and information about vaccine trials. Here, such a property of the organization of social representations as schematization is manifested, when some features are given increased attention, they are emphasized, while others fall out of sight and are obscured.

Discussions about the properties of the vaccine and the specific problems of its use are replaced by a discussion of general social and political problems indirectly related to vaccination.

The frequent mention of specific political figures in discussions of vaccination suggests that the actions and statements of public figures play an important role in the formation of beliefs about vaccination. For example, the Russian President is mentioned in 76% of comments related to the topic of trust in government. According to commentators, the lack of personal examples from people in power who would get vaccinated publicly reduces the level of confidence in vaccination. Some comments expressing doubts about vaccination appealed to the lack of a corresponding example of the use of a domestic vaccine on the part of the government officials ("Putin did not inject himself, so screw this vaccine," "Let them get vaccinated themselves").

In the topic of conspiracy theories, the vaccination process in the world as a whole is personified through the figure of Klaus Schwab, head of the World Economic Forum (he is mentioned in 53% of comments related to this topic), as well as Bill Gates (15% of comments). The WEF itself is often referred to by commentators as a conspiracy aimed at establishing a new world order. As a rule, turning to conspiracy theories manifests itself when a social group or individual, instead of trusting social institutions, chooses to believe in the so-called "stigmatized knowledge" for example, conspiracy theories, alternative medicine, etc. Research shows that such thinking allows individuals in a subjective situation of helplessness to gain a sense of control over their own lives.

Coronavirus is often compared in comments to other diseases, most often to the flu and measles. Such a comparison is usually made in the context of justifying the lack of need for vaccination. From the point of view of the theory of social representations, such comparisons can be considered as the formation of ideas about a new disease through the "anchoring" of its characteristics in the properties of already known diseases. Commentators draw parallels regarding the effectiveness of vaccines against these diseases and the severity of side effects: "Everyone gets sick again, whoever was sick, but then what's the use of vaccination? Everyone will get sick even less, just like with the regular flu every year." From a historical perspective, such consolidation is also carried out in the comments through historical parallels as a comparison of a modern vaccination company with vaccination companies in the Soviet Union.

Emotionally charged statements also form a significant part of the vaccination discourse. As a rule, such messages do not contain a direct indication of the reasons for readiness or unwillingness to get vaccinated but characterize the emotional context in which the communication takes place ("I'm tired of these vaccines!"). Categories describing the emotional side of the discourse included comments containing humorous messages about vaccination, as well as emotional condemnation of both anti-vaxxers and people who have already been vaccinated ("Ahaha... they forced them to get vaccinated with unknown means, and now they will take tests for money") or stubbornly unwilling to get vaccinated ("How many idiots are there in the comments who shout that this is dangerous. Do you also believe in 5G and chipping?").

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4.2. Discussion

The thematic structure of online vaccine hesitancy discourse, as examined in this research, generally fits the vaccine hesitancy model described above, which was developed by the SAGE research group. Our results are also consistent with the most commonly documented factors associated with COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy, such as trust in the healthcare system, public health authorities, and governments; concerns about vaccine safety, perceived vaccine effectiveness, and concerns about rapid vaccine development (Kafadar et al., 2023; Jennings et al., 2021). However, the analyzed texts also contain topics specific to Russian-speaking users, such as the non-recognition of the Sputnik V vaccine by the WHO; links to successful vaccination campaigns in the former USSR; certain historical parallels; and priority of specific social and economic problems.

Results by other research, as well as our results, indicate skepticism about the actions of the authorities and concerns about the safety of the vaccine as leading topics in discussions of vaccination on social media (Chen, Croitoru, Crooks, 2023). Canadian researchers also suggested that doubts about the safety of the vaccine are caused by misinterpretation of scientific facts (Rotolo et al., 2022). The other research noted that the most prominent topics in online discussions of the COVID-19 vaccine were comparisons with other infectious diseases, vaccine safety concerns, and conspiracy theories (Hwang et al., 2022). While positive discourse about vaccination includes a wide range of topics such as "vaccine development," "vaccine effectiveness," and "vaccine trials," negative discourse focuses on topics such as "conspiracy theories" and "security issues." However, positive discourse is more likely to rely on data from authoritative sources (scientists/doctors, medical media/journalists), while negative discourse tends to refer to politicians and online influencers. Our study revealed a similar pattern. But among the sources that users appealed to in their discussions, references to personal examples from everyday life were also very noticeable. An active appeal in all selected topics when discussing vaccination to personal experience, to the experience of friends, relatives, and acquaintances is a vivid example of such a phenomenon as "everyday epidemiology" (Nuti, Armstrong, 2021). Everyday epidemiology adapts official messages regarding behavioral risks to "non-scientific" and non-medical concepts, which is both a way of incorporating new information and a potential barrier to the acceptance of expert information by the medical community. Everyday epidemiology, as an important part of the process of vaccine hesitancy, has a significant impact on the persuasiveness of public health messages. Given the role that social media plays in promoting vaccine hesitancy, it is important to understand how social media can be used to improve health literacy and build public confidence in vaccination (Puri et al., 2020).

It is worth noting that our research has certain limitations and assumptions related both to the specifics of the methods used and to the chosen theoretical framework. Studying vaccine hesitancy through the lens of online discourse poses certain limitations to the study. Firstly, there is no way to link a particular topic to a specific social group, since the available social network data lacks reliable socio-demographic information. Second, our study focused on the discourse generated around vaccination news, and the data were obtained from news communities, which may also have influenced the characteristics of the comments that were selected for analysis. Thirdly, the thematic analysis method

assumes the high involvement of the researcher in the process of processing and analyzing data, and the identified themes and their interpretation are to a certain extent subject to subjective assessment.

Conclusion

Examining the discourse of vaccine hesitancy through the prism of the theory of social representations is important for understanding the potential for changing health attitudes and behavior. Vaccine hesitancy, understood through the lens of health behavior theories (e.g., health belief model or theory of planned behavior), suggests that decisions to vaccinate are influenced by beliefs about susceptibility to disease, severity of disease consequences, benefits of vaccination, barriers to vaccinations and social norms associated with vaccination. Vaccine hesitancy is related to these factors and influences people's decisions to vaccinate and can undermine the public health impact of vaccination programs (Yang et al., 2023).

The functions of the social representations that make up the online discourse of vaccine hesitancy are to describe, classify, and explain vaccination, the pandemic, and related activities; in adapting new facts and phenomena to pre-existing views, opinions and assessments through the so-called consolidation models, turning the unusual into understandable, in regulating behavior by the learned system of ideas. The interpretation of a set of opinions and attitudes as elements of an integral internally ordered system of representations that form a specific discourse demonstrates the difficulty of influencing individual components of this set to promote good health behavior. Due to the multi-stage protection of the central core, social representations are quite stable and resistant to change. Therefore, the process of developing new representations about health and health behavior, including vaccination, is quite long, cannot be carried out through short-term media campaigns, and requires a detailed study of the discursive patterns underlying such phenomena as vaccine hesitancy.

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Key persons who influenced behavior of mothers with young children and information resources during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a variety of information influenced people's behavior. Women often have the role of primary caregivers of children who are less likely to independently adopt appropriate preventive behaviors. In addition, since mothers of young children could be considered one of the most vulnerable groups during a pandemic, identifying their influential persons and sources of information, and reducing undesirable impacts of these on mothers need to be considered. This study explored key persons who influenced behavior of mothers with young children and information resources during the pandemic and described some of these cases that were undesirable for the mothers. In June 2020, based on cluster sampling an online survey was conducted, and a total of 2,489 mothers with young children from all 47 prefectures in Japan participated in the survey. Depending on the child-rearing status, the results varied significantly. Mothers who cared for their children only at home were significantly more influenced by their husbands and parents/other family members. In contrast, mothers whose children received care from others were significantly more influenced by children's teachers, colleagues, and prefectural governors of residential areas. Both groups of mothers spent the most time in acquiring information through TV news and Internet news, respectively. However, compared to mothers who cared for their children only at home, mothers whose children received care from others obtained more information from formal resources. Regardless of parenting status, undesirable aspects of TV news and talk shows were described, and these may have a direct/indirect impact on mothers with young children. During the pandemic, TV would need to report on the difficult situation parents and children are facing, rather than critically broadcasting their behavior.

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Introduction

COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March 2020, and as of December 2023, nearly 7 million deaths had been confirmed (World Health Organization, 2023). With no certainty as to when the pandemic will end, people in the world have been making changes in their lifestyles, whether they prefer it or not. In Japan, no lockdown (city blockade) was implemented, though avoiding 3-Cs (closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings) was recommended (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2020) and a lot of companies have implemented telework (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2021a). Schools across the country were required to close temporarily from March 2, 2020 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2020), and although most schools reopened in June of this year, parents of young children had to refrain from sending their children to preschool for a while in some areas, which was a very difficult time for them (Kimura et al., 2021, 2022a, 2022b).

In emergencies, various information often gets tangled up and during the COVID-19 pandemic, as in past outbreaks, the spread of misinformation has become problematic worldwide (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2020). The term "infodemic" has gained attention. According to WHO, this is the overabundance of information, including misinformation and misleading information, in the digital and physical environment during a pandemic (WHO, n,d.). A joint statement by WHO, UN, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNAIDS, ITU, UN Global Pulse, and IFRC on the management of the COVID-19 Infodemic: Promoting healthy behavior and mitigating the effects of misinformation and disinformation was released in September 2020 (WHO, 2020). In this context, misinformation and disinformation could be considered dangerous, which can damage people's physical and mental health, increase stigma, harm valuable health benefits, and cause inadequate compliance with public health measures, thereby reducing their effectiveness and jeopardizing countries' capacity to control the pandemic. Moreover, disseminated information also has a significant impact on social norms that may determine people's behavior.

As is known, Japan is a super-aging society with older people accounting for 28.7% of the population as of 2020 (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2021). Since they have higher risks of COVID-19, it is critical to implement preventive behaviors not only for older people, but also for other generations in society. Thus, although the risk of death caused by COVID-19 infections in younger generations had been considered small in Japan, many of them took preventive behaviors that were recommended by the government (Official Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, n.d.). However, different from adults, young children have difficulty in determining for themselves appropriate preventive behaviors, and it is expected that caregivers adopt the desired behaviors themselves and share them with their children. Kimura et al. (2022a) reported that mothers of young children in Japan implemented washing hands (88.3%), wearing face masks (87.9%), avoiding crowded place (84.4%), refrain from going out (77.3%), keeping social distance (67.1%), taking care of child's condition (59.6%), paying attention to ventilation (58.9%), and providing balanced meals (55.7%) from March to May in 2020. Furthermore, of these eight infection-prevention behaviors, 30.3% of the mothers had implemented 6-7 of them, 32.7% had implemented all eight. These mothers' behavior were linked to social pressures,

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and others' words and deeds (e.g. touching babies) sometimes affected mothers' mental health and behaviors (Kimura, in press; Kimura and Yamazaki, 2023). Therefore, language, disclosure and society may have significant impact on mothers of young children, though studies on who are the key persons and what information sources influence their behavior have not been sufficiently accumulated.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Women in pandemic

In society, women are still often the primary caregivers for children and are also considered to be one of the most vulnerable populations during pandemics (Kimura et al., 2021; Kimura et al., 2022a; Pierce et al., 2020; World Bank Group, 2020). For example, UN Women and Women Count (2021) reported that during the pandemic, both women and men lost their jobs, but women's paid working hours and income were reduced, and their recovery was slower than men's. In addition, women living with children were vulnerable to losing their economic security and bore the brunt of the increase in unpaid caregiving and domestic work. Especially, the most affected were women with partners living with their children (UN Women and Women Count, 2021). Furthermore, the high incidence of violence against women during the pandemic has been referred to as the "shadow pandemic." (UN Women, n.s.).

Japan is falling behind other nations in terms of gender equality, as seen by the long-standing trend to see men's involvement in housework and childrearing as unmanly and the significant load of housework, childcare, and nursing that is still placed on women (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, n.s.). Under the pandemic, the gap became even more obvious (Study group on the impacts and challenges for women under the COVID-19, 2023). The previous study revealed that changes in circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. shortage of relaxation time, increased difficulty in child rearing, increased partner aggression, increased sense of unfairness) were related to the development of depressive and anxiety symptoms among mothers of young children (Kimura et al.,2021, 2022b).

1.2 Cultivation theory

Cultivation theory was proposed by George Gerbner in the 1960s and 1970s to raise concerns about the long-term effects of television on viewers, shaping their moral values and general beliefs about the world (Mosharafa, 2015). Heavy TV viewers generally converse to a shared outlook despite differences in backgrounds, but light viewers, on the other hand, have different perspectives on the subject (Gerbner et al.,1980a). Park et al. (2022) used the cultivation framework of Gerber et al. (1980) and found that high exposure to misinformation disseminated during active and passive social media use was associated with distrust of information, which was also associated with low confidence in discerning the truth of misinformation. Gender differences were also reported by Gelgel and Ranteallo (2022). They conducted a survey related to COVID-19 infodemics of 440 men and women in Bali, Indonesia, and found that women, compared to men, were more

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likely to accept the content of COVID-19 infomercials as accurate and that they felt themselves more likely to spread misinformation.

In 2020, the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications conducted a survey to find how people perceived and reacted to the information/news related to COVID-19. It concluded that there were a considerable number of people who believed such information even though they thought that it might be inaccurate (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2020; 2021b). In practice, reports of family disruptions due to family member's belief in misinformation have also been accumulated (The Mainichi Newspapers, 2022; NHK, n.s.).

1.3. Social norms

Social norms have the capacity to shape the form and direction of attitudes and behavior of group members, especially individuals who strongly belong to the group (Neville et al., 2021; Smith and Louis, 2009). For example, where no legal provision exists, people wear face masks because others are wearing masks that seems to be an appropriate way to reduce risks of transmission (i.e., informational influence), or because people do not want others to have a negative impression of them by not wearing masks (i.e., normative influence) (Neville et al., 2021).

In Japan, Nakayachi et al., (2020) conducted an Internet survey targeting both men and women in their 20s to 80s in March 2020 and asserted that the most prominent driving force behind mask-wearing was conformity to social norms. Similarly, many mothers with young children during this period struggled with "forcing social norms without realistic considerations" as illustrated by qualitative data, including accusations of going out and accusations of undesirable manners (Kimura, in press). In this study, the word "masks" was the most frequently observed, occurring 168 times and negatively expressed by the mothers (e.g., mothers who were forced to wear masks on their babies complained that it was extremely uncomfortable).

Considering the above, language, discourse, and society have the power to influence behaviors of people during the pandemic, especially for vulnerable women with children. However, who has the greatest influence on these women, where they get their information related to COVID-19, and how these were perceived negatively have not been fully reported. Thus, it is essential to identify key persons and sources of information that influence mothers of young children to ensure they receive adequate information. In addition, to alleviate the psychological burden on mothers, it is also necessary to understand whose and what information could be perceived as undesirable. Therefore, this study explored key persons who influenced behavior of mothers with young children and information resources during the pandemic and described some of these undesirable cases for them.

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                                          during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan"

2. Methods

2.1. Data Collection

The baseline survey was conducted from 6 to 17 February 2020, and the eligible participants were women aged 20–49 years, and had at least one young child (0–6 years). A research company with a survey panel throughout Japan asked their panel to participate in this online survey by email. The respondents who met the study's eligibility in the screening questions (which asked about the age of the mother and child) proceeded to the main survey and only those who had completed all the responses were counted as participants. Recruitment continued in each of the prefectures and was completed in the order in which 100 participants were collected (cluster sampling). Thus, a total of 4,700 responses from all 47 prefectures in Japan (100 respondents per prefecture) were obtained. The follow-up survey was conducted from 16 to 30 June 2020. All participants in the baseline study were invited to participate in the follow-up study by email through the research company. The invitation to participate was closed at the end of the second week when the number of participants no longer increased. In total, 2,489 participants also completed the follow-up survey (response rate 53%). In this study, these 2,489 individuals were used as the cross-sectional data.

Sociodemographic variables included mothers' age, annual household income in yen, educational background, employment status, marital status, child-rearing status, number of children, and child's age. The child-rearing status was categorized as two groups: whether the child was only cared for at home or cared for in other places such as a nursery center, etc.

To describe persons who influenced behavior of mothers with young children during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were asked about the 10 types of informational resources, which included nine related to family and occupational status, and one related to social media. Participants were asked, "Between March to May 2020, how much did their words and deeds influence your behavior?" Responses were graded on a four-point Likert scale (1 to 4), and divided into two groups (influenced or not influenced).

To assess sources of information about COVID-19 and time spent per day, participants were asked, "Please answer the question about the period March-May 2020. From which medium (or persons) did you receive information about COVID-19 and how much time per day?" They were asked to select one of the following six options for each of the ten sources: "I did not receive information," "less than 30 minutes," "30 minutes to less than one hour," "one to two hours," "three to four hours," and "more than five hours."

To understand how mothers perceived influential persons and informational resources as undesirable, I used secondary data from open-ended questions. In the open-ended question, participants were asked to write about their experiences with undesirable words and actions they received from others during the pandemic. Previously, I used these data to investigate mothers' negative social support experiences (Kimura and Yamazaki, 2023; Kimura, 2023, Kimura in press). The present study used the descriptions based on the results of the quantitative data to illustrate undesirable aspects of influential persons and information resources.

2.2 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were conducted on (1) the persons who influenced the mothers' behavior and (2) the sources of information and the time spent to obtain this information. This was followed by a chi-square test to examine if there were differences due to child-rearing status. Next, based on the results, I read the descriptions of open-ended questions several times. Then, the descriptions related to influential persons and information resources that influenced the mothers were extracted and collected.

2.3. Ethics

An ethical review board of St. Marianna University that was my affiliation when the research began approved this study. At the beginning of the online survey, participants provided informed consent.

3. Results

The participants' mean age was 35.6 years (SD±5.4, range 20−49 years), and that of their infants and/or young children was 2.3 years (SD±2.0 range 0−7 years). Of the 2,489 participants, 745 (29.9%) participants cared for their children only at home (home care), and 1,744 (70.1%) participants whose children received care from others (outside care).

3.1. Persons who influenced behavior of mothers with young children during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Persons who influenced behavior of mothers with young children during the COVID-19 pandemic were shown in Figure 1. In total, more than half of the participants were influenced by the words of husbands (59.2%), TV commentators who were medical experts (56.7%), parents/other family members (54.5%), and teachers of children (54.4%). The words of TV commentators who were medical experts had more influence on mothers' behavior than the words of their family physicians/ health care providers (44.2%).

However, when comparisons were made by child-rearing status, there were differences in influential persons. Women who cared for their children only at home (home care) were significantly more influenced by their husbands (65.4%) (P<0.001) and parents/ other family members (57.9%) (P=0.029). In contrast, women whose children received care from others (outside care) were significantly more influenced by children's teachers (62.6%) (P<0.001), colleagues (44.3%) (P<0.001) and prefectural governors of residential areas (51.6%) (P<0.001).
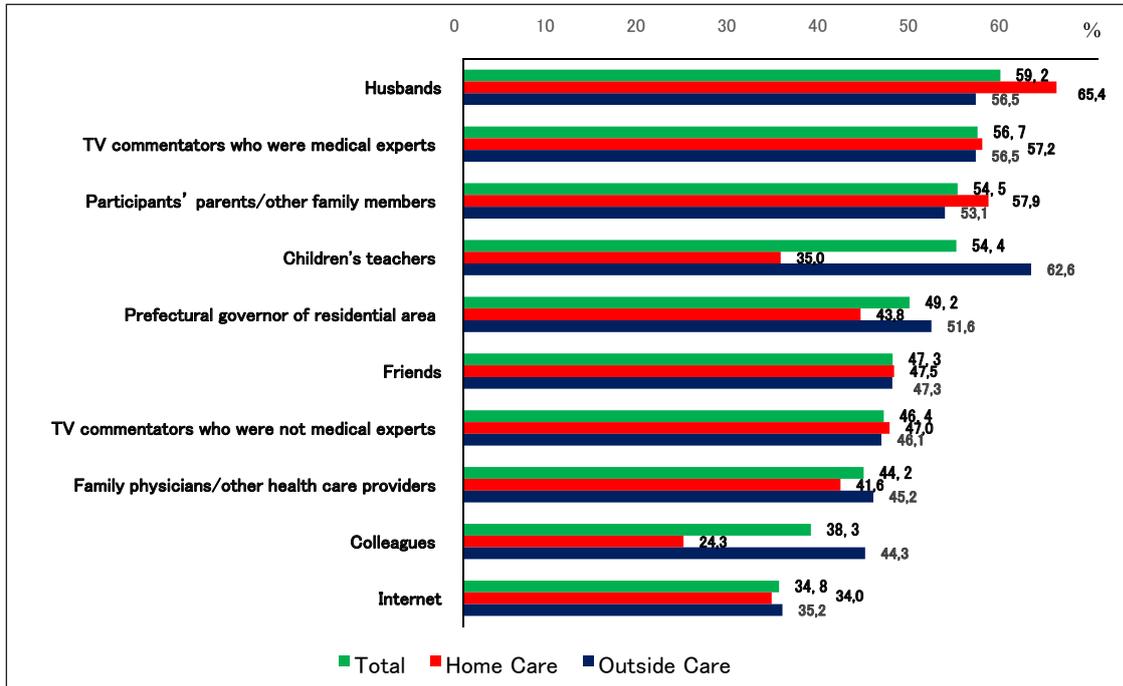
Figure 1. Persons who influenced behavior of mothers with young children during the COVID-19 pandemic

3.2. Sources of information and time spent per day

Figure 2 illustrates a comparison of sources of information about COVID-19 and time spent per day. TV news was the most used source (<30min.=45.5%, 30min.<1hr.=30.0%, 1to2hr.=14.0%, ≥3hr.=.7%), followed by Internet news and interactions with family and friends. The highest percentage of time spent, at 30 minutes, was associated with "Internet news" (59.9%).
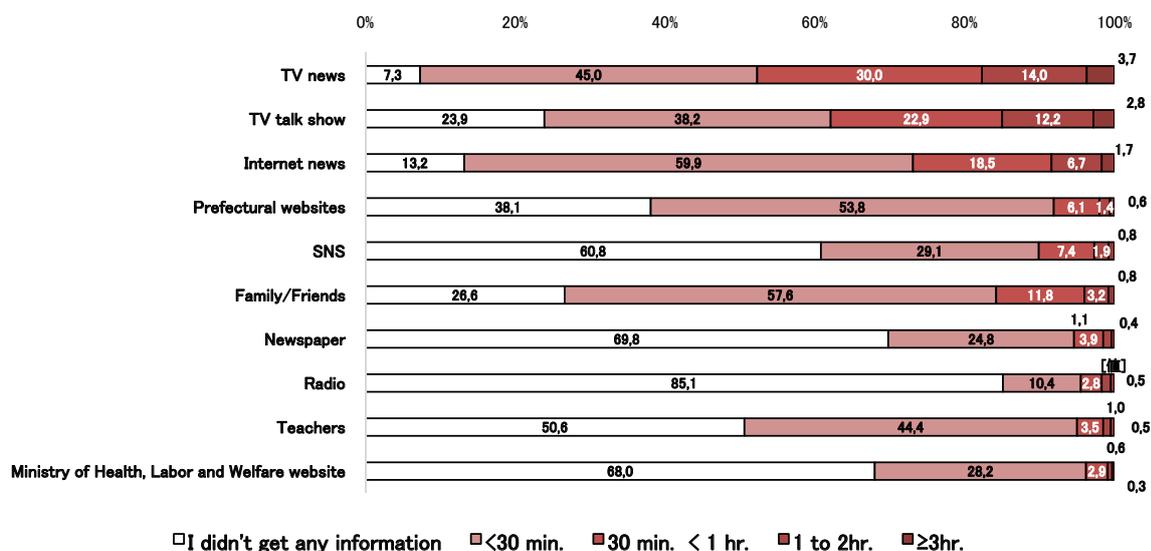
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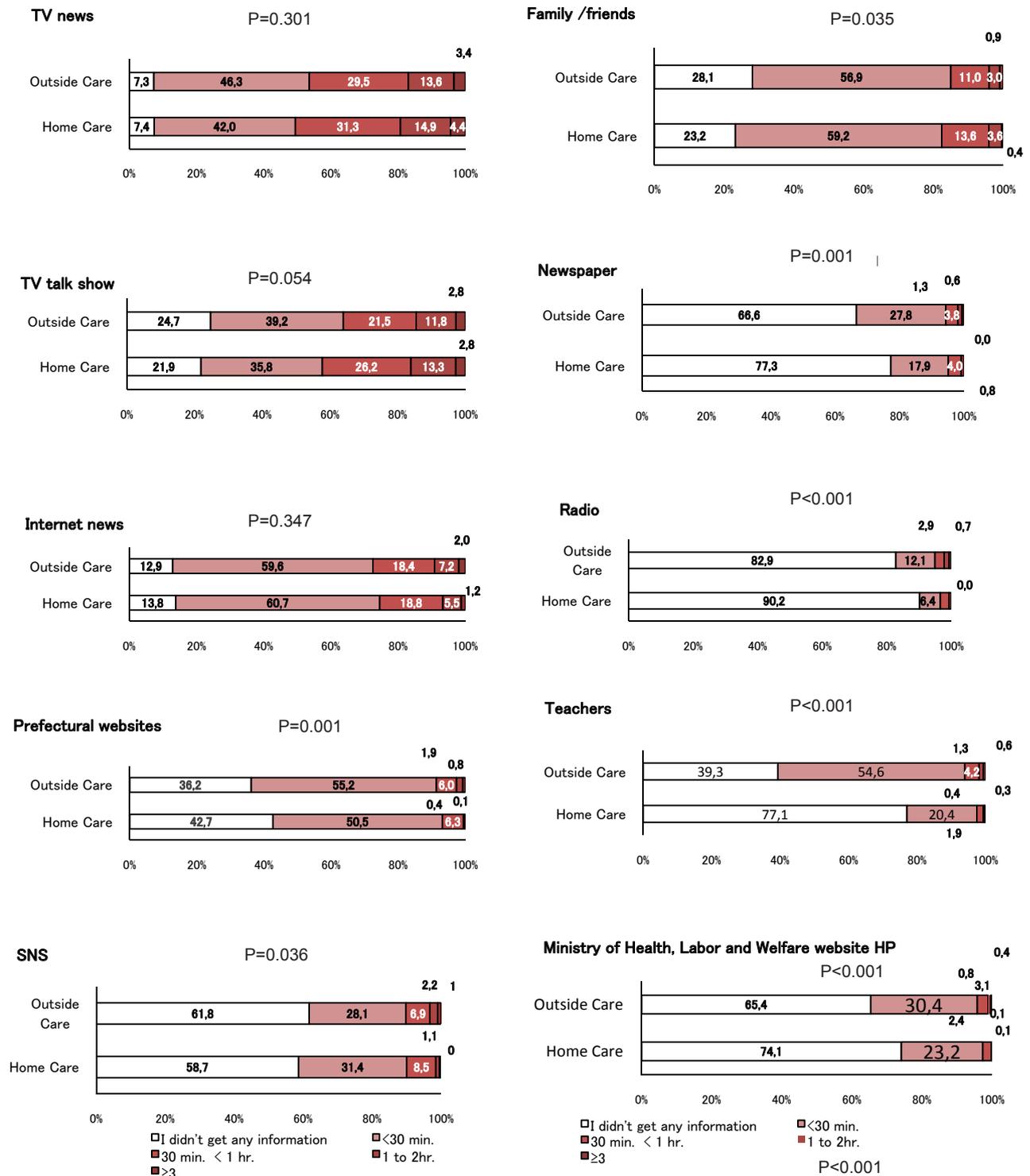**Figure.2. Sources of information aboutCOVID-19 and time spent per day**

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Figure.3. Sources of information aboutCOVID-19 and time spent per day

3.3. Differences in sources of information and time spent per day based on child-rearing status

Figure 3. shows sources of information and time spent per day, highlighting their differences based on child rearing status. Both women who cared for their children only at home and women whose children received care from others spent the most time collecting the information from TV news and Internet news, respectively, and there were no statistical differences. On the other hand, compared to women who cared for their children only at home, women whose children received care from others obtained more information from prefectural websites, newspapers, radio, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare website, and their children's teachers ($P<0.001$ respectively), and less interaction with family/friends ($P=0.035$). The most significant difference in information sources was teachers, with 39.3% of the outside care group and 77.1% of the home care group that did not receive any information from them.

3.4. Description regarding undesirable cases

This section presents descriptions of influential persons and sources of information that the mother perceived as undesirable. Regardless of child-rearing status, the descriptions related to TV news and talk shows were the most commonly observed.

> *I am a medical professional. It was hard for me to choose the right information about work and child-rearing. I was annoyed that the expert opinions on TV talk shows were inconsistent and entertainment commentators spoke as if they knew what they were talking about, even though they were amateurs. I did not believe such comments and tried to seek information from the websites of the prefecture and the government.*
> *(Mother of a four-year-old child, providing care through a nursery school)*

> *I almost stopped watching TV talk shows because I was uncomfortable with the broadcasting opinions of amateurs as if they were representative of the public. I thought it might lead to the spread of misinformation. I obtained the information I needed from the regular news, the press conferences of experts and heads of state that I could now watch on the Internet, and from the homepages of public organizations.*
> *(Mother of a two-year-old child, providing care through a nursery school)*

The above examples represent the persons and media directly influencing the participants' behavior (e.g., obtaining more reliable information from other sources). There were many descriptions expressing anger and questioning the accountability of non-expert TV talk show commentators for their statements. On the other hand, the following are examples of how the media influenced viewers including family members, which in turn indirectly influenced mothers with children.

> *I was very uncomfortable with my mother-in-law and neighbors who were too reliant on the information on TV and gave their opinions without checking themselves.*
> *(Mother of a less than one-year-old child, providing care through a nursery school)*

> *Children playing in the park were featured on TV news and reported as if their activities were problematic.*
> *(Mother of a three-year-old child, caring for child only at home)*

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> *A misguided older man was interviewed on TV and said, "I wish the young people would stay home," while he was free to go out.*
> *(Mother of a one-year-old child, caring for the child only at home)*

Many participants expressed their complaints about TV reports showing children playing outside during the pandemic. They expressed concerns that people who watched these reports would blame both the children and their parents. In particular, their threat from older people can be seen in the following description.

> *I heard that it was very difficult to let children play in the park, even for a short time, because if children played in the park during the restraining period, older people would report them to the police or the school, prompting patrols in the park. But older people themselves were gathering at community centers and having tea parties. Isn't that ridiculous?*
> *(Mother of a five-year-old child, providing care through a nursery school)*

Especially, participants expressed a sense of unfairness toward situations where older people went out and participated in interviews or criticized parents and children for going out.

On the contrary, among the influential persons, significant differences were observed in the case of teachers based on their child-rearing status. Descriptions related to the teachers were only provided by women whose children received care from others.

> *It wasn't my own experience, but a friend of mine attempted to leave her child at a nursery school because of her work, but one of the teachers asked her, "Is this really a necessary job? Do you consider the child's life first?" My friend was quite depressed by this teacher's strict words.*
> *(Mother of a five-year-old child, providing care through a nursery school)*

> *The nursery school has not been closed but the teachers asked me to refrain and I was forced to take time off. This is because I am self-employed, but I can't work with a little child and have no one to rely on. Since I cannot take care of my child when I get sick, etc., This creates strong anxiety.*
> *(Mother of a two-year-old child, providing care through a nursery school)*

> *My child's kindergarten reopened in June, but my child can only attend for one hour a day. Because of this, I have to pick up my child immediately after dropping him off, leaving no time to go home and do housework. My child does not have enough time to play, so I have to take him to the park. So, while I get up early in the morning to take my child to kindergarten, I have been more tired and stressed than before.*
> *(Mother of a four-year-old child, providing care through a kindergarten)*

These examples indicate that while some of the individual teachers' thoughts influence the women, in many cases, the school system (in which the teacher acts as a communicator) greatly influences the women's daily lives. Moreover, even if the system itself is desirable, TV broadcasts that condemn working mothers whose children receive care from others may be psychologically burdensome to them.

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> *Since I could not do telework at my job, I had to leave my child at nursery school and*
> *go to work as usual, a situation which was reported as wrong on TV. (Mother of a less*
> *than one-year-old child, providing care through a nursery school)*

Husbands and family members were closely related to the women, and many of the descriptions were emotionally detailed. As already mentioned, many nursery schools and other institutions were reluctant to provide regular childcare. Thus, during the pandemic, working women whose children received care from others needed help from family members and husbands.

> *The children's grandparents did not take care of them, but they said it was annoying*
> *to see me working while I was with my kids in the living room, which made me very*
> *uncomfortable. This led us to discontinue living together.*
> *(Mother of a three-year-old child, providing care through a nursery school)*

Many of the working women asked their mothers to take care of their children, but some women did not obtain help. In addition, some women gave up asking for help, because their children might have a possibility to convey the coronavirus to their parents, at least their elders were afraid of it. Some women were directly criticized by their family members for their behavior.

> *When I took my child to my parents-in-law's house nearby, they told me, "Don't go*
> *outside hanging around. Don't come over!" They yelled at me.*
> *(Mother of a seven-year-old child, providing care through an elementary school)*

As for husbands, the availability of telecommuting and participation in child-rearing had a significant impact on women.

> *My husband wanted to stay home, but the company wouldn't let him. So, he had to go*
> *to work every day complaining. If I took my children out with me, people complained.*
> *Because of this, I had to stay at home and care for my child all day long. I had a hard*
> *time staying alive.*
> *(Mother of a less than one-year-old child, caring for the child only at home)*

> *My children could not go to school and preschool. It was especially difficult to take*
> *care of my two children, and it was so stressful. But I was able to overcome it with the*
> *help of my husband.*
> *(Mother of a six-year-old child, providing care through a nursery school)*

While there were many differences in the couple's and family's views on infection prevention, the following case describes the decision-making process surrounding the child's medical checkups.

> *The pediatrician's association had disseminated that infant checkups were necessary,*
> *but my husband was worried about our child getting infected and insisted the checkups*
> *should be postponed. That's why my baby was not able to receive the checkup.*
> *(Mother of a one-year-old child, caring for the child only at home)*

In this case, the husband's thoughts took priority over the expert's opinion.

4. Discussion

This study represented key persons that influenced behavior of mothers with young children and their access to information resources during the pandemic in Japan. Also, it described some of these cases that were undesirable for the mothers. Depending on the child-rearing status, the results varied significantly.

4.1 Influential persons based on child-rearing status

The results of the quantitative data showed that women who cared for their children only at home were more influenced by their husbands and family members compared to women whose children received care from others. In contrast, women whose children were placed in other institutions were more influenced by children's teachers, colleagues, and prefectural governors of residential areas, which seemed to be understandable from the perspective of social norms.

According to Neville et al (2021), new coronavirus-related information was disseminated in January 2020, and people relied on others within their social group for direction on how they should react. Although every participant in this study belonged to their own family, women whose children received care from others also belonged to other social groups, and they may behave according to the norms of the groups.

Given that raising children only at home may require informal support, such as that from husbands and other family members, these women may be more influenced by these persons. However, the case descriptions showed that help from husbands and family members should be also important even for women whose children received care from others, especially during a pandemic. Since many of these women were working mothers, support from others should be necessary to maintain their jobs. In Japan, although schools were temporarily closed in March 2020, nursery schools taking care of working women's children were not closed during this period. Nevertheless, parents were asked to refrain from attending school. For women who were already receiving childcare outside the home, the teacher, as the communicator of school policy, may have a profound impact on their lives. Moreover, one of the examples of open-ended questions showed that the teacher said to a woman who brought her child to the preschool, "Do you consider the child's life first?" Such expression may impose pressure on working mothers and evoke feelings of guilt.

Similarly, various types of schools and other facilities may follow the policies of the local government, thus prefectural governors of residential areas may influence women whose children receive care from others. In addition, colleagues could play a role in coordinating time off from work, and observing how other mothers manage their child care may be helpful for working mothers whose children receive care from others. Therefore, such influential persons may differ depending on the child-rearing situation and social groups to which mothers belong.

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4.2. Source of information and time spent based on child-rearing status

Both women who cared for their children only at home and women whose children received care from others spent the most time collecting information from TV news and Internet news, respectively. Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2021b) conducted a survey during the COVID-19 pandemic and reported that TV was also ranked first as a media for "quickly learning about events and movements in the world" and "obtaining reliable information about movements in the world". Thus, TV may be considered to be the most easily accessible information source. In addition, the most frequent duration of TV watching was less than 30 minutes, followed by 30 minutes to less than one hour, indicating that women of this study did not watch TV for a long period. Furthermore, as indicated in the cases, many women expressed distrust of TV commentators.

Previously, Gelgel and Ranteallo (2022) found that women tended to accept COVID-19 related information as accurate than men. Unlike the previous study, the present study did not compare men and women, but based on the descriptions of open-ended question, the women seemed to receive the information more cautiously. According to cultivation theory by Gerbner and Gross (1976), people who views an average of two hours a day or less was defined as light viewers. Thus, although the majority of the participants in this study depended on television as their source of information, these women were light viewers, and they are likely to check its reliability, accept it selectively, and be cautious about the effects it may have on other viewers.

TV may be accessible to busy women who are raising children, as they can watch it while doing housework and other chores. However, it must be noted that this study asked about the source of information that was well-obtained, and not about its trustworthiness. In addition, the women complained about the TV showing images of children going outside as if they were "virus spreaders". Based on media framing theory, Aldamen (2023) surveyed Syrian refugee women and reported that the women's image represented in the media is stigmatized in certain frames related to gender-based issues, and not reflected in individuals' stories. According to Goffman (1974), to make people more aware of social events at a particular time, the media use frames, which could be considered as specific expectancy structures. Similar to these previous studies, the individual stories were not focused on, and only the images of insane women out with their children during the pandemic may be impressed on viewers by TV. Mosharafa (2015) introduced the long-term effects of television on viewers based on cultivation theory, and stated that television invisibly presents hidden values, rules, and morals of what is correct, what is essential, and what is suitable for social discourse. In the present study, however, a single television broadcast's impact on society is considered significant under the prevailing fear of unknown viruses such as COVID-19.

Compared to women who cared for their children only at home, women whose children received care from others obtained more information from prefectural websites, newspapers, radio, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare website, and their children's teachers, and less interaction with family/friends. These findings align with the patterns observed in influential persons. Women whose children received care from others may be more likely to have jobs and require more official information related to COVID-19

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and these may directly impact on child care. Additionally, some women may have many opportunities to collect information at work.

4.3. Undesirable cases and implications

The descriptions of open-ended questions in this study revealed that many participants critically reviewed the statements of TV commentators and strived not to swallow them, or sought to obtain more accurate information from other media. It was also shown that even if the women did not thoroughly believe the information on TV, the impact they had on the viewers may indirectly restrict their behavior.

For example, older people have a higher risk for severe coronary disease than other age groups, and they could be considered as heavy TV viewers (more than 5.5 hours/day on average, even on weekdays, NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, 2021). These factors may contribute to requirements for others who follow strict social norms and may be one reason to blame mothers who go out with their young children. Therefore, instead of critically broadcasting images of children playing outside during the pandemic, it will be necessary for TV to report and broadcast the difficult situations faced by children and their parents who are unable to go outside.

There were also participants with high health literacy, including a woman who accessed the websites of pediatric societies to obtain specialist opinions. However, although such a woman tried to follow the recommendations of the specialists, she ultimately followed her husband's decisions, rather than those of the specialists. Whether this was due to power dynamics within the family was unclear, but it highlights the need to consider an approach to decision-makers.

In addition, the most common persons who influenced women's behavior were their partners, but it was not clear whether this indicated that men were still the decision-makers in Japan or that they discussed and acted together as a couple. Based on gender perspective, comparison with other countries would be needed.

In the workplace, it is suggested that the views of various experts, including those of pediatricians, could be posted where everyone can see them (e.g., displayed on notice boards). If experts' viewpoints are discussed in the workplace, an objective perspective can be brought into the decision-making process within the family on children's health.

4.4. Limitations

This study is conducted as an Internet survey, and there is a potential bias as only women who are registered as monitors can participate in the study. Also, the descriptions focused only on undesirable cases for the mothers, and thus no indications were obtained from desirable cases. Furthermore, the baseline survey obtained 100 subjects per prefecture, whereas the current survey, which recruited the same participants, was not able to gather the same number, which is not the desired cluster sampling. On the other hand, this study was based on quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire, but was also supported

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by its open-ended descriptions to reinforce it. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, this study contributed to explain how women with young children were affected during the pandemic, both in terms of personal relationships and online discourses, and how these were linked to traditional maternal role expectations. These findings may be also useful for international comparative research.

Conclusion

This study presented key persons who influenced behavior of women with young children and information resources during the pandemic. Women who cared for their children only at home were significantly more influenced by their husbands and parents/other family members, whereas women whose children received care from others were significantly more influenced by children's teachers, colleagues and prefectural governors of residential areas. Both groups primarily acquired information from TV news though, most of these women were categorized as light TV viewers and did not always believe the COVID-19 related information.

On the other hand, supplemental qualitative data indicated that expecting mothers' role and social norms that may be influenced by TV broadcasting put pressure on these women with young children. Based on the results of this study, encouraging TV broadcasters to avoid reporting only single aspects of certain groups would reduce pressure on vulnerable groups and prevent intergenerational conflicts. These also implied how language/discourse and society impact on vulnerable population, such as women with children. Future research is needed to compare with other countries based on gender perspectives.

Acknowledgments

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Non thematic

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"Never forget where you come from: Critical
diversity literacy and structure-facing virtue among
first-year students"

Never forget where you come from: Critical diversity literacy and structure-facing virtue among first-year students

Marthinus Conradie[1], Olga Lasocka-Bełc[2]

Abstract

This article investigates tensions that arose when a group of Learning Facilitators (LFs) and students collaboratively examined the socially constructed nature of racial identity. These discussions transpired in a South Africa Department of English, in an introductory module in postcolonial literature designed for first-year students. The core contribution of the article lies in conjoining critical diversity literacy (CDL) and structure-facing virtue to theorise this tension. It also produces suggestions for deepening the emancipatory potential of such discussions about identity and power in ways that are intended to be relevant to other settings in which comparable discussions are occurring between students and contractually appointed university teachers like LFs.

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Keywords

critical diversity literacy, structure-facing virtue, racism

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Introduction

This article combines critical diversity literacy (CDL) and structure-facing virtue to analyze interviews with Learning Facilitators (LFs) who are contracted to teach first-year students about the socially constructed nature of identity (Steyn, 2015, 2023; Madva, Kelly and Brownstein, 2023). This combination helps to theorise the concerns LFs raised during interviews in ways that relate to broader questions about identity and power.

CDL and structure-facing virtue have not yet been combined despite taking a similar stance in a key debate, "If the fundamental source of racial injustice lies in social structures rather than in hearts and minds, then [we must focus on] changing those structures" (Madva et al. 2023: 2).

However, educating hearts and minds need not be abandoned wholesale but redirected. Structure-facing virtue and CDL use similar principles to show how students can be equipped to conceptualize social injustices as systemic. For instance, students can be alerted to the way oppressive systems condition commonsense discourses around identity-formation. LFs facilitate interactions where such aspirations can be accomplished. We argue that these principles generate insights into how LFs can teach students to link oppressive systems with everyday discourses about identity. These insights can prove pertinent to other educational settings that interrogate the nexus between identity and power.

The analysis presented in this article unpacks the tension LFs experienced when students who identify as black South Africans expressed ambivalence about the principle that racialized identities are socially constructed. The central argument of this article is that LFs must not only work with a theorisation of identity as socially constructed. They must also explore how identities are always constructed within systemically unjust hierarchies. The analysis pinpoints moments in LFs' interactions with black-identifying students when doing so became possible. In fact, the LFs reported intuiting the emergence of such opportunities, but remaining uncertain about whether they were permitted to raise questions around power.

Conceptually, this article is anchored in CDL and structure-facing virtue, since both approaches proved useful for theorising the ambivalence that black-identifying students expressed to LFs, and which LFs examined during interviews. The principal contribution of the article lies in showing how these two frameworks theorise interactions that might be occurring in other higher education contexts in South African and elsewhere.

The rest of this article is divided into the following sections. First, LFs' responsibilities are delineated, followed by a justification for involving LFs in research. The interview protocols are outlined next, before elucidating CDL and structure-facing virtue. Finally, the analysis is presented, before offering conclusion observations.

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LF recruitment and responsibilities

Fully employed professors present classes to hundreds of students in one sitting, while LFs play a supporting role by collaborating with groups of 15-20 students. They must facilitate discussions about the post-colonial texts under study, focusing on themes including identity-formation and racism.

LFs are required to become familiar enough with their students to tailor learning activities to their needs, capabilities, and cultural backgrounds. To these ends, they must encourage students to interpret the texts in relation to their own lived experiences. Potentially, this includes the epistemologies that contributed to students' personal and collective subjectivities prior to entering universities. It also includes students' experiences as they navigate the university environment. LFs should, therefore, attend carefully to students' existing and emerging epistemologies around identity. Potentially, the work that LFs undertake can spur critical learning about the entanglements between identity and wider social forces. This is a demanding enterprise, and the study is partly impelled by an aspiration to comprehend LFs' work, hoping to learn how LFs might be supported so that students' critical capabilities are expanded.

Since our scholarly backgrounds are critical race theory and special pedagogy, we consulted LFs and the professors who designed the module, to explore their understandings of the intended outcomes of the module. Both parties affirmed that the module was designed to use postcolonial studies to introduce first-year students to framings of identity as socially constructed and historically contingent, rather than inherent or biological.

Details of the participants and justification for researching LFs

Thirteen LFs were employed for 2023, all of whom consented to interviews. This pool of interviewees compares favourably with other qualitative projects. Two of these LFs had accrued eight years' teaching experience and five had four years' experience. For the remaining six, 2023 was their first year of teaching. In terms of self-identification, seven LFs identified as black, one as mixed-race, one as Asian (Taiwanese) and four as white. All identified as women, apart from one white man.

Ethical clearance was secured from the Institutional Review Board, the Academic Head of the Department, the professors involved in designing and teaching, and each LF. Individual interviews lasted around ninety minutes.

The value of interviewing LFs stems, in part, from the fact that the experiences of contractually appointed university teachers remain under-researched. Analysing LFs' experiences with students can deepen the impact of pedagogies intended to engage students on difficult contemporary issues.

Additionally, of the thirteen LFs, seven self-identify as black and they expressed some familiarity with the reasons why black-identifying students registered uncertainty about

the LFs' approach to identity. For context, it should be mentioned that most of the first-year students in this module self-identify as black, but intersectional differences between these students and black-identifying LFs still exist, notably in terms of educational and financial backgrounds. LFs who identify as black expressed an interest in deepening their knowledge about these intersectional differences, using the interviews as a chance to reflect on their experiences.

Adopting a critical approach to LFs' teaching experiences demands reading their micro-level interactions with students as situated within larger systems and structural arrangements. To achieve this, the interviews are read through the lenses of CDL and structure-facing virtue.

Interview procedures

Individual interviews were selected over focus groups to afford LFs the liberty to examine their relationships with other LFs and with the professors who designed and taught the module. Interviews were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire, organised around these subjects:
1) the teaching methods LFs used to facilitate discussions with students.
2) the topics that were covered.
3) students' reactions to these topics.
4) moments when students articulated discomfort, ambivalence, resistance, or excitement.
5) any personal discomfort that LFs experienced.
6) the potential impact of LFs' positionalities in a South African university context.

Interviewees were also consistently encouraged to raise other topics they considered important. The intention was to conduct the interviews as exchanges that allow all participants to actively co-construct knowledge as the conversation unfolds.

The discourse analysis of the interviews highlighted a pattern expressed by most LFs: a level of tension that arose when black-identifying students registered ambivalence about the precept that group identities along racial lines are socially constructed.

All the LFs who encountered this concern attempted to draw students into an open, peer-centered discussion, during which students were prompted to share and contrast views on the subject. During the interviews, LFs shared the results of their efforts to facilitate these conversations and attempted to interpret what students had shared.

Analytically, the study reads the interviews with LFs using CDL and structure-facing virtue. The next section not only explicates the core precepts of these approaches, but details their exact relevance and utility vis-à-vis LFs, and the work they undertake with students.

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Critical Diversity Literacy

CDL extols, "an ethical sociopolitical stance" that challenges apolitical and neoliberal framings of diversity (Steyn, 2015: 379). It opposes "carnivalesque" discourses that reduce diversity to, "a floating signifier" focused on legal compliance, demographic representivity and superficial celebrations of inclusion, because such discourses ultimately remain power-evasive, avoiding penetrating questions about social justice (Steyn, 2015: 379). Superficial constructions of diversity are not simply inadequate, theoretically speaking, but directly implicated in sustaining injustice.

By contrast, CDL prioritises the rights of oppressed groups to, "be visible, affirmed, and included in how we think about ourselves as social collectivities" (Steyn, 2015: 380). This approach flows from the twin observations that, "The discrete national state belonging to a homogenous population group has been recognised as a myth of modernity" and yet the legacy of this myth still exerts material and psychological consequences. This is evidenced by the continued normalisation of systemic oppression in post-conflict societies such as South Africa.

Critical literacy should, from Steyn's (2015) perspective, instil capacities to notice forces that stymie social justice and illuminate methods of resistance. To this end, critical literacy must exceed a mere, "private accomplishment [and], a set of cognitive skills" (Steyn, 2015: 380). It must encompass both cognitive skills and affective dispositions, with both individual and collective aspects, all of which must be alert to the context-specific nuances of systemic oppression.

Our argument is that CDL is relevant to the work LFs do with students. Below, we enumerate the ten principles of CDL (Steyn, 2015). Each precept is far more nuanced, and we elaborate as necessary during the analysis.

CDL cultivates (Steyn, 2015: 381-387):
An understanding of the role of power in constructing differences that make a difference.
A recognition of the unequal symbolic and material value of different social locations.
Analytic skill at unpacking how these systems of oppression intersect, interlock, co-construct and constitute each other.
A definition of oppressive systems such as racism as current social problems and (not only) a historical legacy.
An understanding that social identities are learned and are an outcome of social practices.
The possession of a diversity grammar and a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of privilege and oppression.
The ability to translate (see through) and interpret coded hegemonic practices.
An analysis of the ways that diversity hierarchies and institutionalised oppressions are inflected through specific social contexts and material arrangements.
An understanding of the role of emotions, including our own emotional investment, in all of the above.
An engagement with issues of the transformation of these oppressive systems towards deepening social justice at all levels of social organisation.
The next section expounds the resonances between CDL and LFs' work, as we see them.

LFs and CDL

First, reflecting Steyn's (2015) approach to diversity, LFs are responsible for fostering a learning environment that engages diversity critically. To achieve this, LFs must avoid framing students simply, or only, as atomistic individuals, as often happens in neoliberal discourses about education, diversity and student success. Rather, LFs must grow their capacity to discern how students are embedded in broader systems that mediate learning.

Second, as LFs pursue the above capacity, they must cultivate an alertness to complex forms of difference. This entails sensitivity to intersectionality and its impact on the way students respond to educational materials. Therefore, the learning interventions LFs use must actively engage students' existing knowledge alongside their emerging insights, as exemplified during the analysis. This also means that LFs must avoid stereotyping students. For instance, students who share racial markers like skin color might not respond identically to classroom interactions. LFs must remain alive to unanticipated dynamics yielded by contrasting ethnic identifications, financial backgrounds, life experiences and other factors (Steyn, 2015).

Third, and of focal significance for this article, the points mentioned so far can be summarised in the first tenet of CDL. All our existing discourses for conceptualising difference, for talking and thinking about classification and categorisation, are always, already moulded by unequal power structures. Sensitivity to the entanglements between power, identity, and injustice, constitutes the central lens through which LFs can learn to envision their teaching and to respond constructively to students (Steyn, 2015). In fact, many LFs are already doing this, as discussed later.

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This sensitivity is also the key commonality between CDL and structure-facing virtue. The latter also contributes a crucial defence as to why education anchored in this sensitivity is worth undertaking at all, as outlined in the next section (Madva et al. 2023).

We suggest that reading the interviews using CDL can pinpoint places where LFs' training can be sharpened, equipping them to respond critically and invitingly to students, even when students express doubt about the direction of the instruction LFs provide.

Concisely put, all educational interactions are already embedded in layers of context that demand critical attentiveness, and CDL pinpoints how LFs might acknowledge some of these layers in ways that make CDL relevant to other learning contexts. These contexts might not witness precisely the same pattern that emerged from interviews with LFs, but the analysis nevertheless outlines how CDL can stimulate productive responses.

Finally, the students assigned to LFs are likely to encounter complex forms of diversity in other classrooms, other educational settings and in life beyond the university. Consequently, honing LFs' capabilities for supporting students' critical literacy is a worthwhile endeavour, and the analysis of interviews with LFs can contribute to this long-term agenda.

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Structure-face virtue

Structure-facing virtue, as developed by Madva et al. (2023), principally concerns what people know about oppressive structures, and how they think, feel, and respond to such knowledge. The concept adds theoretical depth and analytic impetus to our application of CDL to interviews with LFs. Madva et al (2023: 2) insert the concept into debates regarding the purpose and direction of anti-racist education:

"At the root of the problem of racial injustice […] are sets of social practices, laws, and historical forces that advantage white people in myriad ways. Racial animus and psychological entities like stereotypes are said to flow from these more fundamental social structures, not the other way around. […] This diagnosis has been taken to suggest that there isn't much work for moral education to do."

Anti-racist education misses the mark when it aspires to improve inter-group sentiments by reducing prejudice without interrogating systemic power imbalances (Kendi, 2019). Madva et al. (2023) concur that many familiar iterations of education against racism have perpetuated this error, but they insist that education must be redirected, not abandoned.

The aspiration to change hearts and minds can be retained, but the goal shifts towards enabling hearts and minds to discern inequitable systems and to adopt the determination to oppose policies and practices that reinforce these systems. Harmonious daily interactions across difference are unseated as the chief goal because they are insufficient if decoupled from the larder objective vis-à-vis systems. In summary, when asked whether to focus on either changing racist structures or educating hearts and minds Madva et al (2023) promote a both/and position.

Madva et al (2023) don't coordinate their work with CDL directly, but their advocacy coincides with many precepts of CDL. Both frameworks orient education towards teaching how racial differences are not only socially and discursively constructed; they are fabricated within subordinating structures that have proven remarkably obdurate. Moreover, both frameworks highlight how these structures have proven flexible enough to morph under contemporary pressures, including legislation against overt racism and the institutionalisation of diversity initiatives (Ali, 2022; Vachon, 2022; Zembylas, 2022; Allen, 2019). Put differently, both CDL and structure-facing virtue envision racially oppressive systems and the everyday, institutionalised discourses that obscure racism as interdependent. Teaching students about this mutual imbrication is cardinal.

To illustrate, students might experience racial groups as given, static, discrete entities. These experiences might incline them to enter discussions about racism with the intention of ameliorating inter-group conflict. Other students might agitate for post-racial discourses or colour-blindness. In either case, racial categories are abstracted from the marginalising structures that create and sustain them. Consequently, the contingent nature of racial difference is elided. Sensitising students to the relationship between essentialist racial discourses and power structures is vital, and the same applies to power-evasive discourses like colour-blindness.

Our argument is that the doubt expressed by some black-identifying students against the proposition that their racialised identities are malleable and unstable, can be read productively through CDL and structure-facing virtue. The next section clarifies the dispositions that Madva et al (2023) consider indispensable for structure-facing virtue, before linking these with CDL, specifically as a means of analysing interviews with LFs.

Dispositions of structure-facing virtue

First, "structure-facing virtue consists partly in dispositions to notice and act upon situational influences on our minds" (Madva et al, 2023: 13). To clarify, this entails probing beyond surface-level behaviours, especially by embedding what is observed in relation to structural influences. What might this entail for LFs' interactions with students?

To illustrate, when students voice resistance against the teaching that identity is socially constructed, it can be interpreted in ways that racist reify stereotypes. For instance, students can be seen as unprepared for university study. After all, they seem unable to grasp a basic theoretical precept that is fundamental to scholarship in the humanities.

In South Africa, this deficit reading of students might find widespread acceptance as common sense. The deplorable state of pre-tertiary education is well-known and considered a major driver of South African students' poor performance at universities (Adonis and Silinda, 2021).

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Such deficit framings gain racist overtones when considering that the students who expressed unease with this precept often made their own racial identifications a central part of their concerns, as explained during the analysis. However, structure-facing virtue demands more robust attempts to unpack behaviours, and the analysis of the interviews proffers one package of possibilities.

Second, "structure-facing virtue incorporates dispositions not only to attend to situational influences affecting behaviour and thought but to look for ways to change those situations" (Madva et al, 2023: 14). Critical race theorists will recognise how this disposition aligns with calls to promote social justice (Madva et al, 2023). For LFs working with students, this disposition might prove challenging. After all, they occupy a liminal institutional position which, on the one hand, gives them considerable freedom to engage students as they see fit, using learning activities of their own design, based on their insights into students. On the other hand, without the authority to change the texts they are required to teach or to change official assessment methods, LFs might also feel frustrated and unable to attend meaningfully to the "situational influences" which they believe are affective students (Madva et al. 2023: 14). Madva et al. (2023) offer a starting point by outlining the third disposition as follows.

Third, structure-facing virtue elevates resistance against the status quo, promoting scepticism against, "a default tendency to assume that the way things currently are is morally acceptable" insisting instead that, "structural change is appropriate, desirable and achievable" (Madva at. 2023: 15). This orientation hinges on, 1) a willingness to critique the epistemologies

proliferated by hegemonic knowledge institutions, 2) a willingness to regularly undertake challenging cognitive activity, even when it proves affectively demanding, and 3) a capacity to accept that the process of adopting critical views can bring one into conflict with others' viewpoints, including the views of friends, family and/or institutions.

In some regards, LFs already undertake much of this work, given that they are required to draw students into potentially discomforting discussions about racism, personal experiences, collective knowledge and the literature under study. The analysis expands on this point, using CDL and structure-facing virtue.

Author positionality

Identifying as a white man and a white woman makes critical self-reflection exigent. We implemented several procedures such as conducting interviews as opportunities to co-construct knowledge. Doing this requires being open to epistemologies that challenge whiteness and patriarchy. Additionally, we made the writing process transparent to participants by having regular discussions intended to show sensitivity to LFs' concerns and priorities. This step proved impactful, because it allowed LFs to explain that they envisioned the article as an opening to share their perspectives and experiences with a wider audience, while remaining protected by anonymity.

Comprehending identity as socially constructed

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This article examines the ambivalence that some black-identifying students articulated when LFs explored the theoretical principle that identities are socially constructed. First, however, this section discusses students who grasped this tenet with alacrity, according to LFs. It also considers how students found it useful for analysing anti-black racism.

Before continuing it should be noted that some readers might question whether racialisation should be centred in the analysis at all. But racial identifications are relevant, since students made it a cornerstone of their unease with reading race as socially constructed. This is also where attention to systems become vital, as exemplified later.

According to four LFs, some groups of students embraced this theoretical principle speedily. These students not only understood the principle in an abstract sense. They also expressed an increasingly nuanced appreciation of how it can strengthen their awareness of racist systems. As examples, students invoked experiences of anti-black racism in communities outside the university, but all also in the university.

Ananda

"My students explained that race must be socially constructed by recounting memories of white friends they had growing up, who showed zero interpersonal racism until their

teenage years when older white kids and adults told them to abandon their once black friends. How can anyone not be racist as a child, then change over time? It can happen if what race means is learned from the environment. As their white friends aged, their behaviour changed, starting with unspoken racial segregation at school and social events, and my students say this continues into universities. So, what race means depends on context."

This extract, and those it represents, exemplifies how some LFs prompted students to see lived experiences as a pedagogic resource. In this instance, black-identifying students recall times when racial identification posed fewer barriers to social interaction, especially the formation of friendships. In fact, group belonging had yet to ossify into rigid in-groups vs. out-groups.

LFs reflected that these students could imagine a future without racialisation. However, according to LFs, students never lapsed into power-evasive discourses of post-racialism, because they asserted that problematic patterns of socialisation must be recognized and undone first, such as the pattern that inclines some South African children to see themselves as white and then to follow, "unspoken racial segregation".

LFs also discerned intersectional elements of the experiences students invoked.

Ayanda

"There are some key differences between my students from the suburbs vs. rural areas. Those from the suburbs had many interracial interactions. They could mention these relationships with white kids and how they changed, but students from rural areas grew up where everyone was black. They only had interactions with people who look and identify differently after coming to university. For them, it was much harder to think of race as learned or to see systems that limit ideas about race."

These reflections highlight the legacy of Apartheid on contemporary South Africa. Many "rural areas" still endure mass unemployment, abject poverty and failing infrastructure. They are also predominantly inhabited by South Africans racialised as black, a repercussion of the systemic racism imposed by white minority rule. Officially, this rule ended in 1994, but it still mediates contemporary realities. In the context of the tutorials under study, LFs explained that for these students, it was initially harder to extrapolate how race is contingent and contestable. However, some LFs were nevertheless able to facilitate productive conversations.

Anansi

"My black students said they get that race is socially constructed because of on-campus protests that get violent. Some don't even participate in those protests, but when things get violent and vandalism happens, then white professors will look at them a certain way when classes resume as if they were also protesting just because they are black. They say, they get eyed as if they are barbarians. So, that's how these students can say that what race means is situational."

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Faya

"When students share those experiences, I tell them that identity is not about the body you are born with, like it's skin colour and hormones and so on, it's about what society does with that body like calling some bodies barbarian without thinking about socioeconomic inequalities."

To contextualise these extracts, it must be mentioned that South African universities witness regular acts of mass protest, aimed at calling attention to the precarities endured by financially vulnerably students, many of whom are from rural areas.

The protests that were most frequently discussed during tutorials had occurred between 2021 and 2023. The goals had been to challenge the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). NSFAS was originally created to fund students without the financial resources to pursue a university education. The organization has been accused of corruption and incompetence by student protestors, many of whom hail from rural areas of South African (Adonis and Silinda, 2021). For many students who depend on NSFAS funding, universities represent some of their first, consistent, daily exchanges with South Africans who identify along different racial lines. As demonstrated in the extracts cited above, these interactions improved the students' grasp of what it means to construe racial identity as fluid and contextual, rather than given or inherent. Moreover, students could interpolate this perspective on identity with anti-black racism.

The fact that students were able to link anti-black racism with framings of identity as socially constructed, points to an aspect of LFs' teaching. Crucially, from the joint perspectives of CDL and structure-facing virtue, LFs saw these moments as opportunities to interrogate power. Although LFs are not trained in the tenets of CDL, they considered these moments as allowing them to suggest to students that unjust power constructs, "differences that make a difference" (Steyn, 2015: 381).

To clarify, LFs felt ready to propose that group identities are not only situationally contingent in an abstract sense. Instead, they reflect underlying power structures that operate as a taken-for-granted status quo. Simply insisting on the inherent instability of group identities could be taken to imply that group identifications are illusory and thus unimportant (as discussed later). For instance, when white children are socialised to prioritise white identification at the expense of childhood friendships that defy racialisation, or when white professors treat black students with hostility by stereotyping them as "barbarians", then groups are being constructed around whiteness and the racial inequities that have survived the legal demise of Apartheid.

As mentioned earlier, LFs are not presently trained using CDL, but the discussions they facilitate showcase a commitment, on their part, to configuring identity as conditioned by social practices that perpetuate hierarchy. This, in turn, highlights a link between LFs' work and a specific aspect of South African institutions of higher learning.

South African institutions have publicly devoted themselves to unmaking prevailing injustices (Adonis and Silinda, 2021). Interviews with LFs suggest that the teaching

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strategies they employ could play a part in motivating and enabling students to participate in projects to promote social justice, since students are clearly capable of explicating how institutions are implicated in perpetuating some forms of marginalisation. Involving students and their epistemologies is a crucial, and long-term undertaking, but for the immediate purposes of this article, it should be noted that LFs are already mobilising some of the core tenets of CDL in how they envision and direct their pedagogic practices.

The next section deals with interviews in which LFs articulated concern over the ambivalence that some students voiced when engaging with the theoretical precents LFs raised for debate.

Never forget where you come from

This section shares perspectives voiced by LFs to whom black-identifying students articulated scepticism about the socially constructed character of identity, especially group identities organised around race. It details important discourses that emerged from the interviews with LFs, and creates a foundation for an analysis from the joint lenses of CDL and structure-facing virtue, which follows in the next section.

Before citing specific extracts from the interviews, it is worth mentioning the positive pattern that saw students expressing these concerns to LFs instead of remaining silent. Although the LFs never reflected on this willingness from students until it was pointed out to them during debriefing sessions, it might indicate that LFs were indeed able to formulate a foundation for open exchange.

This pattern was not entirely racialised, since some white-identifying LFs discussed similar themes. However, in the interest of centring the voices of black-identifying LFs (and owing to page constraints), the analysis that follows focuses on interviews with them.

Nombusa

"Many of my black students say when they go home, many people say, we are so proud of you for going to university but don't forget where you come from. The same was said to me. Now students say that when I teach them that identity is socially constructed, it feels like I'm telling them to question those people. Back home, people say identity is something you're born with. You're born into a racial group and cultural group. That's who you are. It determines how you must behave, but I'm asking them to question the influence of context. For me, turning that critical gaze on the home environment is good, but for students it's uncomfortable."

Maholi

"Many students reported being uncomfortable with thinking of racial identities as just socially constructed by the environment instead of being something you're born with. They said it makes them feel like I'm teaching them to question the ideas they were raised

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with, to question people back home who say group identity is given at birth. I recognise those words. You cannot change your gender, race or culture. Questioning that means questioning the people who say, we are proud of you for going to university, but never forget who you are and where you come from, which makes it hard for students when I encourage them to question contextual influences."

As mentioned earlier, reading these reflections superficially might see them as disclosing students' unpreparedness for university study. In fact, this might seem like a context-sensitive and realistic appraisal of the weakened state of primary education in South Africa and its effects on students' entry into university environments (Adonis and Silinda, 2021). Such an interpretation might even be touted as a critical recognition of the legacy of Apartheid on the academic readiness of many black South Africans. However, CDL and structure-facing virtue surface the inadequacies of these conclusions.

The twin interpretations outlined above are, obviously, skewed by racism. For one, they suggest that black students are uniquely unready for grasping the tenet that identities are socially constructed. They might also suggest that students' guardians and other people "back home" can be characterised as backward. To be clear, most of the students assigned to LFs identify as black and, consequently, there are no grounds for suggesting that these students are more or less likely to treat group identities as inherent, since students who identify along other lines were underrepresented. It must also be clarified that none of the LFs (regardless of racial or gender identification) voiced such deficit views of students. In fact, as demonstrated below, they favoured interpretive positions that show some amenability to CDL and structure-facing virtue.

Before specifying how these two frameworks might examine these reflections, a further detail is necessary. The following excepts explicate the affective challenges LFs face when they encountered this scepticism. These excerpts also clarify one of the core drivers of students' ambivalence, adding an indispensable factor to the analysis.

Kaya

"Initially, I felt students could relate to me because I'm a black woman like most of them, but when I ask them to question ideas from their home environment, it creates a disconnect. I suspect that for many students the idea that identity is socially constructed sounds like a white idea that can undermine black people's faith in their own ideas, because the lecturers are white, and I come across like I've adopted white ideas. We mainly read non-white authors, but some students think we cherry-picked those who agree with white ideas, but I think this will change beyond first year."

Sinanda

"For now, at least, this undermines my ability to relate to students, because they start to say that maybe these are white perspectives on identity and that if they talk about it too much, they might lose trust in black ideas about identity, but these are new ideas and I think students will grasp them over time."

The uncertainties shared by black-identifying students bear a certain relation to whiteness and systemic racism. Instead of contending that students' "home environments" are uniquely backwards and hostile to questioning authority, CDL and structure-facing virtue suggest that by sharing the above perspectives with LFs, students are showcasing a measure of critical awareness. Students are evincing a degree of unease about the prevalence of whiteness as a structuring factor at the university where they are studying.

Madva et al. (2023) theorise structure-facing virtue around an attentiveness to situational and systemic influences on the behaviours that can be observed in-situ. If applied to interviews, students are not being held back from advancing academically owing to backward epistemologies inculcated in their home environments. Instead, they are bringing diverse epistemologies into productive tension with each other. They are doing this in ways that illuminate the operation of whiteness and systemic racism, both at the university in question, and in the wider economic, sociopolitical context of South Africa. CDL contributes by supplying precise ways of attending to situational and systemic influences. As a point of departure, it spurs recognition of, "the unequal symbolic and material value of different social locations" (Steyn, 2015: 382).

Never forget: A CDL perspective

The unique symbolic and material positionalities from which students' doubt is being voiced can – if acknowledged and validated – repudiate deficit and racist framings of students' responses. To clarify, any analysis must start from an awareness that students navigate a society still marked by racism, sexism and hierarchies founded upon these intersecting matrices of subordination (Madva et al. 2023; Ali, 2022; Steyn, 2015). From this vantage point, students' views are no longer deficient, but valuable resources for understanding how potentially liberating precepts about identity can be subverted by structural shortcomings in the teaching process.

If students' "home environments" have primed them to question whether universities might demand that they adopt "white ideas" that risk alienating them from these environments, then this might not be without good reason. If students are anticipating forms of anti-black racism in the education they will receive, or if they suspect that universities might assume the superiority of its own, institutionalised knowledge over whatever knowledge students gained at home, then their scepticism might be well-founded.

Both historic and contemporary racial injustice in South Africa give students ample grounds for inferring that universities might not be receptive to the familiar epistemologies that students gain from their communities. In fact, this tension sits at the heart of some calls for decolonisation (Ali, 2022; Vachon, 2022; Zembylas, 2022; Adonis and Silinda, 2021; Allen, 2019).

CDL not only legitimises students' doubt in an abstract sense. For example, teaching informed by CDL would not simply categorise students' ambivalence as a form of diversity that should be tolerated. Instead, its precepts validate students' anxiety that their

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education remains grounded in, "white ideas", or institutionalised whiteness. In fact, CDL is committed to supplying "a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of privilege and oppression" (Steyn, 2015: 385). As such, teaching grounded in CDL would prompt students to, "interpret coded hegemonic practices," including deficit views of students' "home environments", using concepts such as whiteness and intersectionality. Crucially, this does not mean abandoning the proposition that identity is socially constructed as a way of respecting students' communities, but it does entail more carefully explicating why this teaching is liberating. Nevertheless, it seems clear from the interviews that many students experienced these teachings around identity as threatening. Careful attention to the discourses students used highlights another insight from CDL.

Two expressions that students frequently used to articulate their positions, according to LFs, are that identities are "just socially constructed" and that students feel uncomfortable with "questioning the home environment". The prevalence of the former suggests that some students understood this tenet as asserting that all forms of knowledge founded upon identity-specific experiences are not simply questionable, but potentially invalid. In short, the claim that identities are "just socially constructed" is mistaken for claiming that they do not matter.

One part of students' ambivalence might, therefore, flow from the anxiety that they are being expected to embrace a post-racial, post-gender vision of society, since these identities are simply contextual, discursive constructions. Students are, in that sense, evincing a capacity that LFs can expand and sharpen – the ability to read, "oppressive systems such as racism as current social problems and (not only) a historical legacy" (Steyn, 2015: 384). Similarly, students' anxiety over "questioning the home environment" might indicate unease with what they interpret as the claim that these epistemologies have no place in the university context.

These possibilities highlight an omission in the education that LFs were instructed to provide to students. Some lived experiences can illuminate how, "all our categories for thinking about difference are socially constructed within unequal power relations" (Steyn, 2015: 318). Experiences that showcase how identities are shaped by marginalising power structures should be afforded a unique level of prominence and centrality in any critical appraisal of the nexus between social justice and identity. For instance, Adams, Salter, Kurtis, Naemi and Estrada-Villalta (2018: 339) insist on "the importance of marginalised knowledge from the epistemic perspective of subordinated communities as a resource for critical consciousness".

In other words, students were not encouraged to view the ambivalence generated by their "home environments" against universities as a useful sign of the marginalisation to which these communities are subject. Students were not effectively encouraged to see their own experiences with navigating the transition between different communities as a resource for critical thinking. Far from claiming that identities are "just socially constructed" students could have been made to feel that the competing discourses they are encountering around group and individual identities can generate strategies for advancing social justice. More precisely, students could have been afforded opportunities to question the relationship between universities, home environments and overriding inequalities in South Africa.

However, it should be clarified that this analysis is not intended to blame LFs for the above-mentioned shortcomings. On the contrary, during the interviews LFs highlighted their concern that tutorials failed to communicate an emancipatory and empowering vision of identity as socially constructed, from which oppressive structures can be unmasked and problematised. A key obstacle for LFs is that they were uncertain about how to proceed once this obstacle had been uncovered.

Maholi

"This semester was all about teaching students that identities are socially constructed. The second year will unpack power and that stuff, or that's how I have it, so I just wasn't sure what to do when students were so doubtful."

To shed further light on this dynamic, it is crucial to recall LFs' earlier observations regarding intersectionality, and the "key differences […] between my students from the suburbs vs. rural areas".

As mentioned earlier, the LFs reported that students from suburban areas could call upon more experiences with children who were later racialised as white. These experiences impelled a certain appreciation of how identities are socially constructed and, significantly, how this perspective on identities unmasks the subtle persistence of racism in contemporary South Africa. These divergences in the lived realities of students from suburban vs. rural areas hint that the module under study was implicitly designed with the former audience in mind. As such, an intersectional lens surfaces a foundational shortcoming in the module's design – over which LFs could not exert any control. The module is hampered by an underappreciation of the diversity of its audience.

This mismatch between the module and its student audience exacerbated the affective labour LFs were compelled to undertake. Most of the LFs who identify as black were able to recognise students' uncertainty as a familiar discourse. They had also encountered it while transitioning to university. However, despite being familiar with exhortations to, "never forget where you come from", these LFs found their education around identity, discourse and power emancipatory. They did not consider it a wedge between themselves, and the epistemologies cultivated in their communities beyond the university. Given this experience, they expected that students would resonate with them as their teacher-student relationships developed. By contrast, when faced with some students' ambivalence, these LFs' expectations were overturned.

Sinanda

"I really felt like as time went on that students were less likely to relate to me and to trust that I would never teach anything intended to undermine the value of their experience or discount their sense of who they are as black people."

By analysing these aspects of LFs' experiences, this study intends to suggest that CDL and structure-facing virtue offer impactful guidelines for engaging first-year students, but they also arm LFs, by enhancing their own capacity to see themselves as situated

in subordinating structures. LFs' attempts to resonate with students and to create an emancipatory learning environment are clearly embedded in these structures, and produced by them, with affective repercussions.

CDL prioritises interrogations of "the role of emotions," seeking to uncover how flows of affect can expose marginalization (Zsögön 2021) and highlight areas that demand change (Steyn, 2015: 387). LFs reported that participating in the interviews helped them to explicate the interrelatedness between their own affective responses to students, and the shortcomings of the module's design – shortcomings which reflect a structural failure to recognise the diversity of the lived experience that students bring to the university. This realisation, for LFs, points to several conclusions.

Conclusion

We did not select structure-facing virtue until the first stage of our analysis highlighted its relevance. Subsequent analyses, coupled with debriefing sessions with LFs, called our attention to the exhortation that, "anti-racist moral education [can] continue to aim at changing hearts and minds [but it must] provide instruction about the character of social structures," and it must aspire to, "teaching people to see structural change as appropriate, desirable, and achievable" (Madva et al. 2023: 15).

To readers who already support such action, Madva et al.'s (2023) position might seem obvious. Nonetheless, this study has drawn on both the experiences of LFs, and their efforts to assign meaning to these experiences by participating in interviews, to surface specific junctions and ways in which both structure-facing virtue and CDL can exert concrete implications for teaching about the interface between identity and power. These implications might resonate with similar teaching contexts.

When discussing the findings of the study with the professors who designed and taught the module, they explained their ambition to dissect questions about power with students during the second year of study. Nonetheless, the findings can be interpreted as proposing that students need to be exposed to an analysis of systems/structures alongside the teaching that identities are socially constructed, instead of staggering these precepts into discrete units. At least two more specific implications can be inferred from the findings.

First, with regards to students, some of them clearly experienced dissonance between the epistemologies they were expected to embrace at the university vs. the worldviews espoused in what they called their "home environments". This offers an opportunity. The dissonance itself can become a topic of discussion and study. Doing so carefully would reward students for noticing this discord, and for voicing it to LFs and fellow students. Taken together, this affords an opportunity for students and LFs to examine the social dynamics that impact how precepts taught at the university interact with perspectives created outside its formal strictures. Put differently, students are invited to interrogate how different epistemologies can be brought into conversation in ways that unmask the operation of power. Involving students in this manner signals to them that their concerns

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and experiences matter for learning, which is a central priority for many critical forms of education (Ali, 2022; Vachon, 2022; Zembylas, 2022; Allen, 2019).

LFs, for their part, should have been empowered, permitted, and trained to respond sensitively when students raised this topic – especially since those LFs who identify as black resonated with the experience and could have mobilised those experiences to facilitate a critical analysis in collaboration with students. This might have inclined students to feel recognised and included, not in a superficial celebration of diversity, but because students possess unique forms of knowledge born from the symbolic and material social locations from which they can speak.

In this sense, the analysis presented in this article attempts to proffer more than an abstract, decontextualised provocation that identity and power must be examined as inevitably entangled (which is not to claim that abstract theorisation is not indispensable in some scholarly venues). This is done by highlighting that when black-identifying students expressed their ambivalence, they took a measure of ownership of their learning by instigating an opportunity for critical learning. They created a platform on which the theories they were encountering, and more familiar worldviews could be brought into productive tension. To be clear, both the knowledges produced at universities and the familiar perspectives generated at "home environments" can be interrogated and contrasted, without wholly accepting or rejecting one or the other. In turn, this could have yielded a strong foundation from which first-year students can enter the second year of studies during which, presumably, questions of power are more forcefully unpacked (cf. Odrowaz-Coates 2019).

Second, with regards to LFs, all of them explained that they initially felt exhilarated at the prospect of teaching students about how identities are socially constructed. They were under the impression that by framing identity in this way, they would be introducing students to the beginnings of what CDL would term a "diversity grammar and a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of privilege and oppression" (Steyn, 2015: 387). This excitement is significant, but LFs mentioned that they were never explicitly encouraged, during training for example, to mobilise their own intersectional experiences as a resource for connecting with students and for enhancing teaching. Moreover, despite the LFs' excitement, once the possibility arose to link identity and power, LFs remained doubtful about their remit for venturing into this terrain since their teaching was intended to focus on the socially constructed nature of identity in isolation from power.

If the module under study, and similar teaching projects, is seriously devoted to affording a well-structured and impactful engagement with critical theory – whether though post-colonial literature or other modalities – then more consideration is vital for linking identity to power from the beginning instead of separative the two. Additionally, LFs should be encouraged to envision their own lived realities as resources for teaching and should also be trained in how they might do this. CDL and structure-facing virtue not only proffer precepts to achieving both these goals, but also outline principles that can be translated into specific teaching outcomes.

Finally, the analysis of the interviews also raises complex questions about belonging and inclusion. How should students respond once they become aware of the potential conflict

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between what they are learning at the university and the views cultivated in other settings? For example, are students required to privilege one set of knowledges over the other? More precisely, should students accept that because they have been raised as members of certain cultural, ethnic and racialised groups, they are obligated to embody the values that some associate with those groups? These questions caused some anxiety for many students, at least as reported by the LFs. Adopting the dispositions of structure-facing virtue and CDL first calls attention to the workings of power, as already mentioned. From this vantage point, students can be reminded that the theories under study at university are not intended to push them towards a particular decision, but to empower them to identify as they see fit and, more importantly, to notice and oppose the oppressive dynamics that generate conflict between different positionalities in a hierarchical society such as South Africa.

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Discourses of Students in Initial Teacher Education: Perception of Mental Health Knowledge and Its Impacts on Their Well-being

Ledia Kashahu (Xhelilaj)[1], Dilina Beshiri[2], Kseanela Sotirofski[3]

Abstract

The mastery of teacher competencies is intrinsically linked to the quality of educational service (OECD, 2013). Consequently, the initial preparation of teachers and discourse on the competencies they should possess have long been focal points for educational researchers, predating even the Covid-19 pandemic (Caena, 2014). This discourse has intensified notably in recent times (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021). A mixed methods approach is used in this study. First, a quantitative survey was used to create a descriptive and correlational analysis. Later, semi-structured interviews were utilized as a qualitative method to conduct some in-depth explorations. The quantitative part of study aims to explore the level of preparedness of students in Preschool and Elementary Education programs regarding mental health, the primary methods through which students acquire knowledge, and the relationship between this knowledge and their well-being throughout their teacher education journeys. The study sample comprised students from the Faculty of Education at the University "Aleksandër Moisiu", Durrës, Albania (N=123), 19 of whom were interviewed to identify through qualitative methods the promoting factors and inhibiting factors of well-being and mental health during the study years. Based on the literature, a semi-structured interview instrument was prepared. For the quantitative data collection, two scales were developed for this study: one to gauge students' perceived

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level of mental health knowledge and another to identify the sources of this knowledge acquisition. Student well-being was assessed using the self-assessment questionnaire CSSWQ (Renshaw, 2020). Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 22 software, while the qualitative data set was processed manually.

According to the students' self-reports, they demonstrated an above-average level of knowledge on mental health, deriving this knowledge from both the university's curriculum and external sources. The study revealed weak positive correlations between mental health knowledge and academic efficacy ($r = .024$, $n = 123$, $p < .008$), but moderate positive correlations with academic satisfaction ($r = .31$, $n = 123$, $p < .001$), school connectedness ($r = .31$, $n = 123$, $p < .001$), college gratitude ($r = .36$, $n = 123$, $p < .001$), and student well-being ($r = .34$, $n = 123$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, this paper engages in discourse analysis to establish concrete recommendations for enhancing the relevant study programs.

Keywords

Teacher preparation, initial education, mental health, student's well-being.

Introduction

Education in Albania is in the phase of important reforms at all levels, both in pre-university education and in higher education. The National Education Strategy (NES) in Albania, one of the most important documents for education policies, has paid special attention to the completion of the 4th objective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. *Ensuring qualified teachers* is considered by policy makers as one of the three national priorities to achieve this objective. In fact, it is known that the quality of education is closely related to the quality of teaching (OECD, 2020). In particular, strategic objectives for the year 2021-2026 are focused on the initial education of teachers. This is also seen in the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MoESY) for education, where we will single out the specific objective A2 which focuses on: "*creating opportunities for quality teacher training...*" (MoESY, 2021, p.8).

There are currently 9 Public Higher Education Institutions in Albania that offer initial education programs, but none of the programs in all these higher education institutions have yet completed the accreditation process. An extensive process of discussions was carried out on the curricula of the teacher training programs that form the same profiles in order to have a unification of the content of the curricula up to the extent of 80%, to guarantee the quality of the programs based on the professional standards of the teacher, but this has not yet been applied in all Universities. In the analysis presented in the NES for university teaching programs, the ratio of theoretical and practical knowledge as well as their integration in pedagogical practices is seen with concern, but also the absence of some important topics not addressed in the initial training of teachers (MoESY, 2021- 2026, p. 41).

In this context, the Faculty of Education at the University of Durrës is making an effort to carefully evaluate the quality of the initial teacher training study programs.

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The present study represents our attempt to pinpoint issues with the initial preparation of Pre-School Education and Primary Education teachers. We aim to not only identify the gaps in their training and devise strategies to provide them with the essential knowledge and practical skills to effectively navigate the teaching profession but also to determine what more needs to be done to improve their subjective well-being and mental health care both during and after their study years.

Literature review

Well-being is the main substance of educational goals in all educational systems. In the vision of the education strategy, it is stated that the education system in Albania among others aims at:... quality education of all individuals, *contributing to their personal well-being...* (MoESY, 2021-2026, p.8). There are two views on the well-being of the individual. In the *hedonic perspective,* well-being is seen as related to the individual's subjective experience, that is, how satisfied and happy he/she is with the life he/she leads. In the *eudaimonic perspective,* the well-being of the individual is seen as related to his psychological functioning, i.e. how much and how the individual is able to create positive and productive relationships with others, reach his potential and feel self-fulfilled (Ryan and Deci, 2001, in Kashahu and Orzeł Dereń, 2022). The concept of well-being is considered a very complex theoretical concept and with a very high variation in terms of the definition of the term (Kashahu and Orzeł Dereń, 2022). However, in all cases, well-being has been seen to be related to mental health. This is also clearly seen in the World Health Organization (WHO) definition of mental health, in which mental health is defined as: *"a state of Well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community"* (WHO, 2004, p.12).

Teaching is listed as one of the most difficult professions (Kyriacou, 2001; MacIntyre et al., 2019) and with high burnout (Jerrim et al., 2021). One in two teachers have the idea of leaving the profession (Räsänen et al., 2020). Many teachers around the world give up the teaching profession due to facing a heavy workload and a number of stressful factors they face (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2019). This has made universities today in the world to reflect and cultivate in their teacher training programs knowledge, skills and values related to the in-depth knowledge of the profession, the challenges that accompany it, the development of psychological resilience skills, as well as the development of capacity for transformative awareness that are also the bases for the development of social-emotional competence (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019).

Studies in Albania prove that even teachers in Albania face the same stressors as teachers around the world (Kashahu et al., 2020), even twice as much (Cekani, 2015). The data show that the higher the level of stress experienced by teachers, the higher the level of burnout (Cekani, 2015). Female teachers experience the lack of support from the administrators more than men, Meanwhile, men experienced depersonalization more than women (Kashahu et al., 2021). Some of the stressors that have been identified to be related to the increase of teacher stress found by studies in Albania are the inappropriate behavior of students (Cekani, 2015; Karaj, and Rapti, 2013), the high number of students in the class (Cekani, 2015) time

pressure and teacher overload at work (Cekani, 2015; Karaj and Rapti, 2013) relationship with the school principal (Karaj and Rapti, 2013) low status of the teacher (Cekani, 2015; Kashahu et al., 2020), and the non-positive media portrayal of teachers (Kashahu et al., 2020). Teacher stress affects teacher burnout, causing emotional exhaustion, which is related to negative attitudes towards students (Cekani, 2015; Prendi and Karçini, 2018). The factors that influence the job satisfaction, but also the stress of primary education teachers are related to the understanding that the teacher finds in the relationship with parents, colleagues and school leaders, but also their perception of being effective in teaching (Kashahu and Tartari, 2021) that is directly related to their well-being.

A low level of teacher well-being harms not only the teacher in terms of his immediate and further mental health, but also the institution and students, who are affected by his low performance. Although there is a dearth of studies investigating the relationship between teacher mental health and student mental health, researcher Harding and colleagues have found that there is a positive relationship between teacher and student well-being. They studied a sample of 3,217 eighth-grade students in England and Wales and their 1,167 teachers and found that low levels of teacher well-being were associated with poor teacher-student relationships. Likewise, high levels of teacher depressive symptoms were associated with lower well-being and psychological distress for students (Harding et al., 2019).

On the other hand, the well-being of students during university studies is a well-studied issue. However, research mainly focuses on the stress that students experience and the literature lacks studies where student well-being is seen to be related to students' perceptions of their abilities. This trend of studies is related to the fact that students are in a critical phase of their development and in the phase of transition from adolescence to adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This stage of development coincides with the period where mental health problems peak (Grøtan et al., 2019; McGorry et al., 2011). The period of university studies turns out to be busy for students (Grøtan et al., 2019; Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019), who experience more stress than the rest of the population, due to the pressure for academic achievements, especially in the first semester of starting studies (Beick et al., 2010). This can cause some students to have mental health concerns (Cuijpers et al., 2019; Grøtan et al., 2019) and harm their well-being and academic performance (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019; Grøtan et al., 2019).

However, studies show that engagement in learning processes has a positive relationship with the well-being of students, including variables such as academic efficacy and satisfaction and school connectedness. Levels of student involvement in academic processes are also related to levels of academic performance, which affects not only academic satisfaction and student well-being as a whole (Boulton et al., 2019; Tran et al., 2022). While low levels of academic satisfaction are important predictors of stress, depression and anxiety (Tran et al., 2022). Rubach and colleagues have discovered positive links between teaching quality and increased academic satisfaction, which is associated with higher well-being for students (Rubach et al., 2022), but also with higher academic performance. School connectedness is also an important indicator of academic performance, as students spend a significant amount of their time at university. High levels of school connectedness, in addition to affecting academic performance by improving it, at the same time improves the climate of the academic environment and student well-being (Reynolds et al., 2017).

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Another factor that affects academic performance, but also the well-being of students, is academic self-efficacy, which can increase over the years. So, first-year students have a different level of academic efficacy, compared to students in the last years, since they improve their academic self-efficacy over the years (Cassidy, 2012). Researchers Grøtan, and colleagues, (2019) found that there is a strong relationship between mental distress, academic self-efficacy, and dropping out of studies due to difficulty in academic progress. Even Honicke, and Broadbent, (2016) have evidenced the impact of academic self-efficacy on academic achievements, where students with high academic performance feel more effective. The researcher Gustems-Carnicer, and his colleagues (2019), think that the study of the well-being of students preparing to become teachers is of particular importance to avoid long-term problems in their lives, as they are becoming ready for a difficult profession.

Koller and Bertel, (2006) argue that insufficient preparation of teacher candidates about their knowledge of mental health poses a problem for teachers in identifying the different types of acute mental health problems faced by students such as stress, anxiety, depression or violence at school. On the other hand, the studies mention the problem of the teachers themselves with their mental health. They note that especially the problems at the beginning of their careers when the teachers faced stress due to the burdens and stress that work brings (pressure to achieve high results with students, problems with students' behavior, communication with angry parents). Teachers themselves testify that they feel unprepared to manage their burnout symptoms (Koller et al., 2004; Koller and Bertel, 2006). The question that arises in this case is: Can someone who has not previously invested in mental health and the cultivation of emotional intelligence and who does not have emotion-regulation ability meet the expectations that time puts forward? How can the teachers become a support for the mental health of the students, when they cannot even protect themselves?

The preparation for a particular competency and the teacher candidate's confidence in mastering that skill serves as a predictor of what he/she will be able to do effectively once he/she practices the profession Brauer (2010). Since there are few studies in the world that measure the perception of teacher candidates on their mental health preparation, and none in Albania, we thought that our study would make a modest contribution in this direction. This study is an attempt to understand the effects of the programs that we offer at the Faculty of Education "Aleksandër Moisiu" University, Durrës regarding the formation of students to respond in the right way to the demands of the time.

Methodology

The choice of the mix methods approach of this study is suitable for education research (Creswell et al., 2003) and in the same time is in accordance with its goals: 1) to reveal the perception that the students of Preschool Education and Primary Education teaching programs have on the level of their preparation on mental health; 2) identify how they have managed to benefit from their knowledge on mental health; 3) to discover the relationship that exists between this knowledge and their well-being while attending teaching programs; 4) to discover the supporting factors and the factors negatively impacting the well-being and mental health of students during the years of their study at Faculty of Education.

The participants and data collection

The sample of this study were the students of the Faculty of Education of the teaching programs of Preschool Education Bachelor, and Elementary Education at the Bachelor and Master level. Since we aimed to measure students' perceptions of their knowledge about mental health, but also the relationship that this knowledge had with their well-being during studies, for the selection of the sample, the criterion was set that the bachelor's level students were in the year third of the second semester of the academic year 2022-23, since these students are at the end of a program and university experience and have created a perception of the knowledge they possess. Part of the sample were the students of the first and second year of the Master's in Elementary Education, but also some students who had finished their studies in the above-mentioned programs, who were invited to be part of the study voluntarily. After explaining the purpose of the study to the students, we created a Google form questionnaire and distributed the link for completion. 123 participants took part in this study, of which 8 men, who made up 6.5% of the sample, and 115 women or 93.5% of the study participants. Of these, 9.8% were students of the Preschool Teacher Education program, BA year 3, 25.2% students of the Primary Teacher Education program, BA year 3rd, 45.5% students of the Primary Teacher Education program, MA year 1st, 12.2% students of the Primary Teacher Education program, MA 2nd year and 6.6% Alumni students. To provide qualitative materials, the research question of the study were answered by 19 students (17 females and 2 males) continuing their studies at both BA and MA levels in both programs were interviewed, among whom 9 students resided in Durrës and 10 students came from other cities.

Study instruments

For the needs of the study, a two-scale questionnaire was created for knowledge about mental health: a) for measuring the level of knowledge about mental health according to the students' perception (5 point likert scale with 5 point likert scale 1-"Strongly disagree" to 5- "Strongly agree") b) and to identify the source of obtaining this knowledge (answer 1- Several topics in one course; 2- "A special topic in one or several courses", 3- "Discussions in the auditorium, but not a specific topic in a course" 4- "Literature that I browsed myself", 5-"Media", 6- "Another way") The questionnaire was piloted before use. To measure the students' well-being, the 16-item CSSWQ self-report questionnaire (Renshaw, 2020) was adapted in Albanian (5 point likert scale, 1-"Strongly disagree" to 5- "Strongly agree"), which measured the subjective well-being of students and consisted of four subscales for the dimensions: 1) academic efficacy (4 items); 2) academic satisfaction (4 items); 3) school connectedness (4 items); and 4) college gratitude (4 items). For collecting qualitative data through semi-structured interviews, three guiding questions were formulated: 1) How would you describe your well-being and mental health during your studies?; 2) What has positively influenced your well-being and mental health during the years of study?; and 3) Which factors do you think have negatively affected your well-being and mental health?

Data analysis

The statistical program SPSS version 22 was used for data processing. First, reliability analyzes were performed for the instruments used. Value for Cronbach's Alpha for

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scales and subscales are: α=.91 for *Mental health knowledge*; α=.89 for *Ways of gaining knowledge about mental health*; α=.86 for *Academic Satisfaction*; α=.87 for *Academic Efficacy*; α=.82 for *School connectedness*; α=.86 for *College Gratitude*; as well as α=.95 for *Student Wellbeing*). In order to measure the perception that the students of Preschool and Primary Education teaching programs have about the level of their preparation on mental health, descriptive analysis of frequencies, measurement of central tendencies, as well as data reduction technique, specifically principal component analyzes (Turne et al., 1998). In order to find out what are the ways in which they have managed to benefit from their knowledge on mental health, descriptive analyzes were carried out for frequencies as well as regrouping of responses expressed in percentages. For the questionnaire borrowed from the literature, factorial analyzes were performed to validate the factors of the original scale. In order to find out the relationship that exists between these knowledges about mental health and their well-being while attending teaching programs, correlational analyzes were carried out which were interpreted on the basis of correlation coefficients according to Davis (1971). Furthermore, discourse analysis was used to examine qualitative data derived from the transcripts of the interviews (cf. Odrowaz-Coates 2018, 2019). The qualitative processing was based on labelling and coding techniques of students' narratives about their experiences. The pen and paper method was used as the volume of collected data permitted for this solution. Predominant repetitive codes were identified using a bottom-up approach to find key elements contributing to, or hindering their wellbeing.

Strengths and limitations

It is the first time to study the perceptions of teaching program students on their mental health preparation and the main ways students gain knowledge, as well as the relationship that exists between this knowledge and their well-being while attending teaching programs. The instrument for measuring subjective well-being (CSSWQ), which was used in this study, is valid and reliable (Renshaw, 2020). However, the questionnaire for measuring mental health was used for the first time, and the sample of this study is small and was taken only in one institution of higher education, because this was also the purpose of our study. Similarly, the qualitative findings are valid for the time when the study was conducted, but given the changing conditions in the university, the factors influencing the decline in students' well-being and their mental health may also change.

The results and discussion

The level of knowledge about mental health according to the perception of students

The analysis of the central tendency values showed that the perception of the students of the teaching programs of Preschool Education Bachelor, and Primary Education at the Bachelor and Master level for their knowledge on mental health is above average in the total value. The average values, sorted in descending order, show that in terms of general knowledge about mental health *"knowledge about mental health"* (M= 4.11, SD = .832)

students feel better compared to the other aspects taken into consideration as: *"teacher stress factors in the teaching profession"* (M= 3.82, SD = 1.033); *"knowledge about teacher burnout"* (M= 3.59, SD = 1.202); *"asking for help if they realize that they are burnout at work* and *their strategies are not working"* (M= 3.56, SD = 1.151); *"understanding the signs of teacher burnout"* (M= 3.52, SD = 1.097); *"knowledge about strategies to protect themselves from burnout at work"* (M= 3.51, SD = 1.089); *"knowledge about high to help a colleague who shows burnout signs at work"* (M= 3.51, SD = 1.190). In tab 1. the data are presented sorted according to the questions in the questionnaire completed by the students.

Table 1. Means, standard deviation of students perception of their preparation on mental health

Variable	M	SD
1. I have knowledge about mental health.	4.11	.828
2. I have learned what is teacher burnout.	3.59	1.202
3. I know the stress factors in the teaching profession.	3.82	1.033
4. I know how to understand the signs of teacher burnout.	3.52	1.097
5. I know how to use strategies to protect myself from burnout at work.	3.51	1.089
6. I know where to ask for help if I realize/will realize that I'm burnout at work and my strategies are not working.	3.56	1.151
7. I know how to help a colleague who shows burnout signs at work.	3.51	1.190

Note: M and SD are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

What stands out from the ranking of the average values is that there are small differences in the values in terms of student knowledge, for the aspects of mental health considered in this study. It seems that they have better perceptions of knowledge about stress factors and signs of burnout, but values decline regarding knowledge about strategies to cope with burnout for themselves or to help colleagues facing burnout. These indicators can be improved even further if investment is made, especially by increasing the quality of teaching, as there are studies that prove that the quality of teaching increases satisfaction and academic performance (Rubach, et al. 2022). Likewise, more space should be devoted to knowledge of strategies to cope with stress, where the average values are even lower. These perceptions are important because according to Bandura's (1977) theory, an indicator such as confidence in the skills and knowledge that individuals possess is a factor that motivates them to increase their performance in the activities they undertake, but at the same time it is predictive also strong for psychological well-being.

We say this because even though the situation in Albania is stressful for the teacher. They do not have a tendency to leave their jobs, even though they would very much like to do so, because in Albania there are very few other opportunities for an individual with a teacher's education to find himself in the labor market (Kashahu et al., 2020). This means that teachers will continue to work as teachers despite the damage caused by the profession, as there is evidence that teachers who experience high levels of burnout and high levels of stress show serious health problems (Cekani, 2015). On the other hand, the problems of

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burnout and the poor mental health of the teacher do not only harm the teacher, but also the students due to the decrease in their performance as teachers (Arenz and Morin, 2016). The problems are also magnified due to strained teacher-student relationships (Harding et al., 2019), which are the starting point of problematic situations between the parties (Prendi and Karçini, 2018). Researchers Arenz and Morin (2016) studied 389 primary education teachers teaching 7899, 4th grade students. They found that teachers' emotional exhaustion had a negative relationship with standardized test scores and students' grades, but also with the satisfaction that children felt in school and with the support that teachers offered them. Additionally, teacher mental health affects student mental health (Harding et al., 2019).

How are gained knowledge about mental health according to students

Descriptive analysis of frequencies highlighted that students have benefited from the knowledge on mental health both from the university program (1-Several topics in one course; 2-A special topic in one or several courses; 3- Discussions in the auditorium) and from sources outside the auditorium (4-Discussions in the auditorium, but not a specific topic in a course; 5-Media; 6- Another way) see Figure 1 and 2. It seems that *"knowledge about mental health"* (27.6%), for *"Signs of teacher burnout"* (26%), and for *"strategies for burnout"* (21.1%), the students gained the highest percentage from reading the literature that they browsed on their own, not as part of the program, although there is no lack of knowledge gained from a topic or several topics that deal with mental health in the program, but also the discussions in the auditorium.

Figure 1. The frequency of the ways of gaining knowledge according to the perception of the students, expressed in percentage (mental health, teacher burnout, stress factors, and signs of teacher burnout)
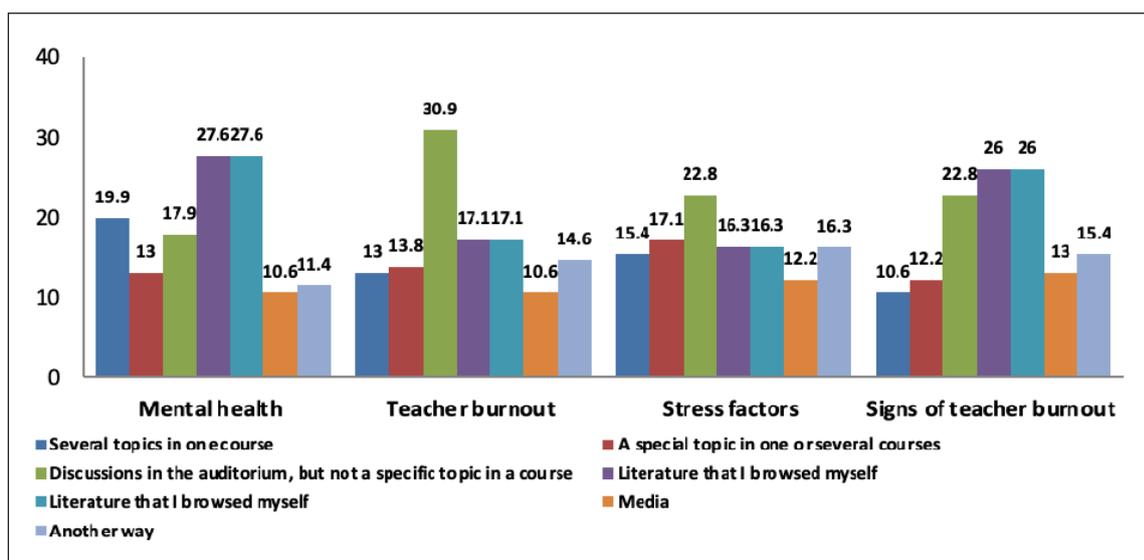
When the topics covered in the classroom are interesting and of practical importance, students also deepen their knowledge with individual work (Ives, and Castillo-Montoya,

2020) and they also look for other sources. While *knowledge on teacher burnout* (30.9 %), stress factors (22.8 %) and signs of teacher burnout (22.8 %), strategies to seek help for oneself (25.2 %), and strategies to help colleagues who show signs of burnout (24.4%), have benefited more from discussions in the auditorium, even though it is not a topic dedicated to this purpose. This prompts us to consider examining even more carefully the scope of the curriculum of teacher study programs which, according to Ralf Tiller, is nothing but the depth and breadth of content accompanied by learning experiences (Orstein and Hunkins, 2003). The aim here is to make the treatment of these topics more deliberate and structured.

Figure 2. The frequency of the ways of gaining knowledge according to the perception of the students, expressed in percentage (strategy for burnout, ask for help for burnout, and help a colleague with signs of burnout)
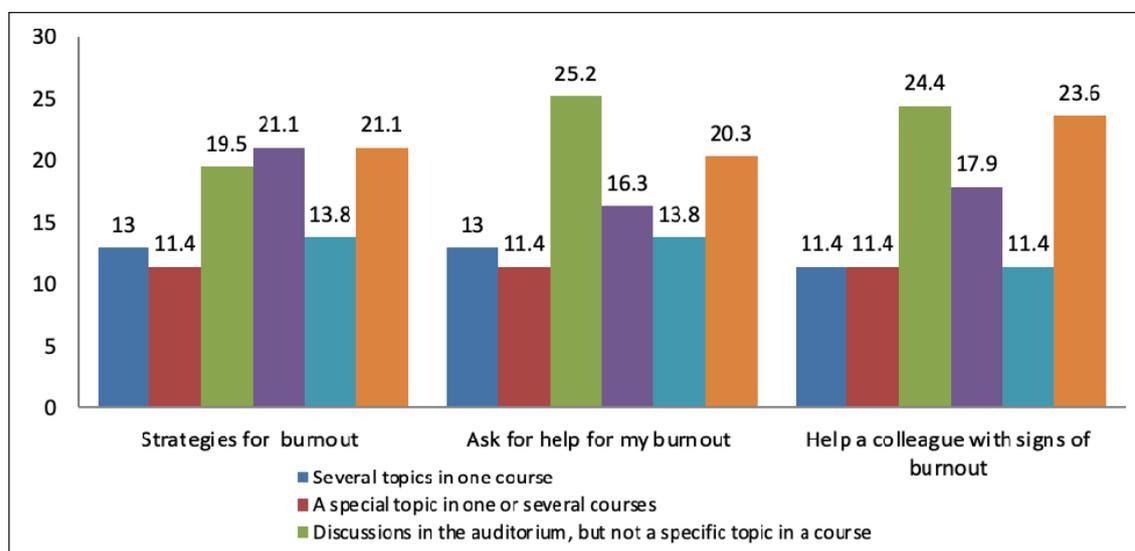
It is noted that the benefit of knowledge through the media is also considerable (ranging from 10.6% to 13.8), which means that lecturers should guide the student in terms of media content. Also, we note that the students of this sample have developed at least 2 pedagogical practices (bachelor students and master's students 3 and 4 practices), which means that for their answers they refer to the contexts they have experienced in school practices. This also explains their higher perceptions of gaining knowledge from "*another way*" aspects such as *"strategies for burnout"* (21.1 %), *"strategies to seek help for themselves"* (20.3 %), and *"strategies to help colleagues who show signs of burnout"* (23.6 %) see Fig.2.

After regrouping the percentage values with two groups: knowledge gained from teaching and discussions in the auditorium and gained from other sources, out of the auditorium, what stands out is that "knowledge about mental health", for which they had reported the values higher in the perception of their abilities, it is proven that the knowledge was obtained almost equally from teaching and discussions in the auditorium 50.4% and from other sources, out of the auditorium 49.6%.

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Regarding *"knowledge about teacher burnout"* (57.7% teaching and discussions in the auditorium / 42.3% other sources) and *"knowledge about stress factors in the teaching profession"* (55.1% teaching and discussions in the auditorium / 44.9% other sources, out of auditorium) it seems that the study program helped the students more than the alternative resources outside the auditoriums. Interesting are the statements on *"understanding the signs of teacher burnout"* (45.6% teaching and discussions in the auditorium /54.4% other sources, out of auditorium), *"knowledge about strategies to protect themselves from burnout at work"* (43.9% teaching and discussions in the auditorium/ 56.1% other sources, out of auditorium) and *"knowledge about high to help a colleague who shows burnout signs at work* (47.2% teaching program/ 52.8% other sources, out of auditorium) where the average knowledge values were relatively slightly lower for the students' perception of the possession of this knowledge, it is stated that the knowledge is more based on sources outside the classrooms. We think that these benefits are also related in the environments of pedagogical practice. In terms of *"asking for help if they realize that they are burnout at work and their strategies are not working"*, knowledge has been acquired almost equally (49.6% teaching and discussions in the auditorium/ 50.4% other sources, out of auditorium). Table 2 shows in detail the percentage values grouped by two categories: teaching and discussions in the auditorium and knowledge acquired in other ways, outside the university.

Table 2. The percentages of the ways of gaining knowledge about mental health according to students

Variable	Gained from teaching and discussions in the auditorium	Gained from other sources, out of auditorium
1. I have knowledge about mental health from ...	50.4	49.6
2. I have learned what teacher burnout is from ...	57.7	42.3
3. I know the stress factors in the teaching profession from...	55.1	44.9
4. I know how to understand the signs of teacher burnout from...	45.6	54.4
5. I know how to use strategies to protect myself from burnout at work by...	43.9	56.1
6. I know where to ask for help if I realize/will realize that I'm burnout from work and my strategies are not working...	49.6	50.4
7. I know how to help a colleague who is showing signs of burnout at work from...	47.2	52.8

It is noticed in almost all the mental health variables taken in the study that students gain knowledge not only in the university, but also outside it. In fact, this is also the purpose of university programs, to create a vision and orientation for new teachers, and on these bases

they will further deepen their knowledge and develop the competencies that a teacher must possess who can cope from the point of view of mental health and unexpected situations such as the case of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The relationship between knowledge about mental health and the well-being of female students during the period of studies.

The study revealed a weak positive relationship between *knowledge about mental health* and *academic efficacy* r = .024, n = 123, p < .008. Moderate positive relationships were also found between *knowledge about mental health* and *academic satisfaction* r = .31, n = 123, p < .001, school connectedness r = .31, n = 123, p < .001, *college gratitude* r = . 036, n = 123, p < .001, and *student's well-being* r = .342, n = 123, p < .001. This means that the more they feel proficient in the knowledge obtained, the higher are the values of the indicators of their subjective well-being as students, such as academic efficacy, academic satisfaction, school connectedness and college gratitude. For more detailed connections between variables, see tab 3.

Table 3. Correlation between students perception of mental health knowledie and same aspects of students' well-being

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Mental health knowledge	1					
2. Academic Satistaction	.310**	1				
3. Academic Efficacy.	.237**	.637**	1			
4. School connectedness	.310**	.834**	.682**	1		
5. College Gratitude	.357**	.753**	.557**	.838**	1	
6. Student Wellbeing	.342**	.912**	.804**	.945**	.888**	1

Note: N= 123
* p<0,05. ** p<0,01.

Well-being is the best prevention to protect students from poor mental health. This is not only because mental health problems affect their personal lives in many ways, but also because university students are the future of the human capital of any country (Cuijpers, et al. 2019). The work with students preparing to become teachers of the faculties of education needs even more attention, because the future teachers will work for the education of the new generation, which is also related to the contribution to the country's human capital, but with an even higher impact. Studies have proven that academic performance has a positive relationship with the subjective well-being of students (Boulton et al. 2019; Reynolds, et al. 2017; Rubach, et al. 2022; Tran, et al. 2022) and with more specific indicators of well-being such as academic satisfaction (Boulton et al. 2019; Rubach, et al. 2022), academic efficacy (Cassidy, 2012) and school connectedness (Gopalan, and Brady, 2020; Reynolds, et al. 2017). Studies prove that college gratitude is also an indicator that improves the mental health and well-being of students in general (Daulay, Assingkily, and Munthe, 2022; Tolcher, Cauble, and Doëns, 2022). While the perception on the performance that students have today, will affect the beginning of his/her work with more

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complete knowledge and it is known that a well-formed teacher is able to provide quality education for students.

Wellbeing and mental health in students discourses

From the qualitative data processing, it was noticed that all four factors that positively influence students' well-being and mental health during their years of study, such as academic achievements, relationships within the social group (between students), relationships between professors and students, and family, are at the same time factors that may also influence the opposite side (see table 4). In other studies, it has been evidenced that high academic achievements reduce the level of stress (Tran et al., 2022) and have a positive correlation with subjective well-being, as students with higher achievements have higher perceptions of their self-efficacy (Honicke and Broadbent 2016). Conversely, low academic achievements become significant factors for high levels of stress and are associated with anxiety and depression (Tran et al., 2022).

Table 4. Student perception on the factors that have influenced their well-being and mental health.

The factors that support the well-being and mental health of the students	The factors negatively impacting the well-being and mental health of the students

1. **High academic achievements**
  1.1. Result-oriented work towards academic progress.
  1.2. Satisfactory results in midterm and final exams.
  1.3. Enjoyment experienced from group work.
  1.4. Positive and encouraging feedback on course assignments.
  1.5. Experience of feelings of self-fulfillment and success.
	1. **Low academic achievements**
	  1.1. Unproductive work in academic progress.
	  1.2. Poor results in midterm and final exams
	    1.2.1. High levels of stress and anxiety due to low achievements
	  1.3. Exam results not meeting expectations
	  1.4. Critical and discouraging feedback on course assignments
	  1.5. Experience of feeling of failure

2. **Positive relationship with the social group**
  2.1. Warm and friendly communication and mutual respect.
  2.2. Mutual assistance not only for academic matters but also empathy and support in other social aspects it relates to the academic field, but also empathy and support in other social aspects.
  2.3. Cohesion and emotional connection, especially in cases when students share accommodation together.
	2. **Stress during exam season (Very high stress especially in Semester I of the first year, but also Semester II)**
	  2.1. Experience of feelings of stress and anxiety during exams (even after the first year)
	  2.2. Experiencing anxiety when working in groups where students have little acquaintance and have low commitment and expectations for course results.

The factors that support the well-being and mental health of the students	The factors negatively impacting the well-being and mental health of the students
3. Positive relationship with the course professor 3.1. Positive classroom atmosphere where the student's needs are fulfilled 3.2. Interactive teaching where the student feels motivated. 3.3. Experience of satisfaction and self-fulfillment during the learning process. 3.4. Opportunity to correct course assignments after receiving feedback, as a second chance.	**3. Problems with adjusting from high school to University** 3.1. Difficulty in understanding how the study program and assessment system work (during Semester I of the first year) 3.2. Dealing with the new environment (many students in a different group than high school classes). 3.3. Experience of feeling invisible 3.4. Adjusting to voluminous literature compared to high school 4.4. Adjustment to the different demands of professors

4. Family (Support from the family)
4.1. Financial support
4.2. Support for meeting daily needs by saving time and energy
4.3. Emotional support
	4. Tense relationship with the social group
	4.1. Prejudice within the group (diversity and stigmatization).
	    4.1.1. Language (dialects)
	    4.1.2. Background
	    4.1.3. Physical appearance and clothing
	    4.1.4. Cultural differences
	4.2. Experience of feeling excluded

	5. Tense relationship with the course professor 5.1. Stigmatization 5.2. Monotonous teaching and lack of motivation 5.4. Lack of clarity 5.5. Lack of transparency in assessment
	6. Financial problems 6.1. Need to take on any job to afford living expenses (especially when students come from other places of residence) 6.2. Working long hours
	7. Family (Students coming from other places of residence) 7.1. Dealing with daily needs alone 7.2. Feeling of being alone
	8. Accommodation problems (students coming from other places of residence) 8.1. Lack of dormitories for students 8.2. High rents

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The factors that support the well-being and mental health of the students	The factors negatively impacting the well-being and mental health of the students

	9. Problems with public transportation to reach the university campus
	  9.1. High cost, as the line has separate subscriptions and a low number of subscriptions (not all students can afford to buy them)
	  9.2. Low frequency of buses
	  9.3. Slow movement speed (high time expenditure for short distances)
	  9.4. Overcrowding

Source: Qualitative data from interviews

Similarly, studies show that a positive classroom climate results in stress reduction, increased satisfaction, and motivation, as found in other studies (Rubach 2022). Since this coin has two sides, it is important to understand that academic staff need to increase awareness to create positive climates in the classroom. The classroom climate and how academic staff behave affect the creation of positive emotional states that encourage students' efforts and increase their motivation to seek the desired outcome, also supported by the professor. The researcher Pop (2023) suggests the use of non-formal activities in education as instructional strategies to create free relationships between teachers and students with the aim of motivating them to be active participants through their life experiences.

Positive relationships with both academic staff and amongst students serve as protective factors as much as hindering factors for both well-being and mental health. Therefore, academic staff should be careful to create a positive atmosphere during teaching and the relationships they build with students, but equally important is the management of student interactions with each other. This is especially relevant when defining work groups for projects and joint tasks, aiming for every student not to feel hindered or stressed due to the relationships that may arise in a workgroup, but rather the opposite.

All interlocutors cited their first year of study, particularly the first semester, as a challenging time marked by high levels of stress and anxiety relating to not only their academic performance but also their struggles adjusting to university life and, in the case of students coming from other cities who study in Durrës, their separation from their families. Students report feeling stigmatized because of their background, language barriers, and a host of cultural prejudices that prevented them from actively participating in open discussions in the auditorium or in group project preparation and presentations. They also report difficulties adjusting and in their relationships with other students in the group.

The detachment from family and the assumption of all responsibilities by these students have influenced in most cases an increase in stress and significantly decreased the well-being of students. While for students residing in Durrës, family is mainly reported as a supportive factor. The family is reported to have been influenced as a supportive factor

for the well-being and mental health of all students, even when they did not have sufficient financial support, they felt emotional support from their parents.

Students coming from other cities also report accommodation as a very stressful factor. Since the University currently does not provide affordable dormitories, students coming to study at UAMD also have to deal with high rental prices. To cope with the high expenses, all students share apartments with other students, which they consider to be a challenge in itself. Here's how one of the students expresses it:

> *"I just arrived from Dibra, and I didn't know any friends to share the expenses with, even though my dad managed to find a house through an acquaintance. I had to search and found two girls coincidentally at the university, but I had a lot of problems with them. When it was time to pay the rent, I was very stressed because they were not fair in splitting the expenses. On one hand, the stress of school and exams, and on the other hand, money problems... it felt like I was losing my mind... I talked to my mom all the time and just cried... I failed three exams and was ready to go back home and drop out of school."*
>
> Third year Bachelor's student

Financial problems are seen as a factor that negatively affects the well-being of students and their mental health. They report that the need to cover expenses for studies, transportation, which is also reported as a problem for students from Durrës as well as those coming from other cities, and accommodation, forces them to work long hours and in jobs that do not suit them and do not leave them enough time to study.

> *"I've been working as a nanny for three years in a family where I not only take care of the children but I can't leave work undone. The lady has her own business and at least I combine the hours when I have classes. This keeps me there, but because of this tolerance, I work more than 9 hours a day and even clean their house on weekends. The pay is too little, and I don't have time to eat, wash for myself, or study. I only have the night to read, but when I'm too tired, sleep takes over..."*
>
> First year Master's student

> *"I'm from Durrës and live in the beach area, but from the beach to the university, I need two buses and each has its own subscription. Every month I stress thinking whether I'll find an abonnement or not, because they are limited although we line up often I end up not buying as they run out. I need a lot of money to come to school without an abonnement..."*
>
> Second year Bachelor's student

Because houses in the beach area during the winter period are cheaper than houses in the central part of Durrës, many students coming from other cities are accommodated in the beach area and face problems not only with transportation but also with releasing the apartment during exam periods.

> *"Last year at the end of the year, I went through a stress I can't forget... On one side, I was at school and at work, and on the other side, the exam season had started and the*

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landlord demanded that I vacate the house according to the agreement we had made. I stayed at some friends', but I was uncomfortable because I put them in an awkward situation, and I wasn't comfortable myself. I had nowhere to study for exams because the university library is far away and stays open until 4 pm. It wasn't worth taking the school bus that goes like a snail and the expense..."

Third year Bachelor's student

In summary, the first experiences of studying in Durres for many of our interlocutors, future teachers, were like experiencing a culture shock (as described by Odrowaz-Coates (2017) who was using Oberg's classification). Although they were not entering a different country with a distinctly different culture, they found themselves experiencing a profound culture shock. For those who came to Durres from elsewhere this experience was connected to the language used in academia, to the new and unknown social environment and to complete life-changing experiences of being 'far away' from home. To local students, the same applied to a degree, apart from being away from home but the level of expectations, the level of responsibility for their achievements, and the level of what they perceived as sophisticated language felt as if they were entering a different unknown world. These experiences contributed to challenges for their overall well-being.

Conclusions and reccomandations

One of the main findings of the study is the positive relationship between indicators of subjective well-being such *as academic efficacy, academic satisfaction*; *school connectedness* and *college gratitude* and students' perceptions of *the knowledge they possess on some important aspects of mental health*. To increase the subjective well-being of students studying in teaching programs, it is important to work hard for the highest possible achievements so that they feel as capable as possible when they begin their career as a teacher, as it is a difficult profession, where even beginners are expected to perform in the same way as experienced teachers, this is a challenge that not all professions face. Good posture and confidence in their knowledge will give students who are preparing to become teachers more internal balance to realize the teacher's standards.

The study revealed that students preparing to become teachers of preschool education and primary education have an above-average perception of their knowledge on mental health. These perceptions are important because according to Bandura (1977), an indicator such as confidence in the skills in the knowledge that individuals possess motivates them to increase their performance in the activities they undertake, but at the same time this is a strong predictor also for psychological well-being. Likewise, it was found that knowledge is gained by students (the sample of this study) from teaching and discussions in the auditorium and gained from other sources, out of the auditorium, in almost equal proportion. Individual work and the use of alternative resources are of indisputable importance. However, it is appropriate to invest more from the academic staff, in such important knowledge of teacher promotion as their mental health. For this formation, we think that university programs should carry even more weight.

Today, special attention is being paid, at least in written documents, to the teacher's commitment towards the *social and emotional needs* of students. Distance or combined learning during and after the covid-19 pandemic created increased stress for both teachers and students. This effect still continues due to the creation of various gaps that the students have created. The created situation has increased even more the society's expectations for the knowledge, skills and habits that teachers must possess, to respond to the social and emotional needs of students in addition to academic progress, while the concern that teachers receive little knowledge in their initial and ongoing education to meet these demands is a long-standing concern (Graham, Phelps, Maddison et al., 2011; Koller et al., 2004; Koller, and Bertel, 2006; Morris , 2002).

On the other hand, studies show that teachers have insufficient knowledge about mental health and therefore are unable to support the mental health of their students (Mazzer, and Rickwood, 2015; Atkins, and Rodger, 2016; Reinke et al., 2011). Their insufficient knowledge about teacher competence in mental health proves to be a barrier in terms of cooperation with mental health professionals in schools. This finding refers to a study conducted in Norway, which used a mixed method design to study the issue as deeply as possible, studying it both qualitatively and quantitatively. Moreover, in this study it was found that even though teachers value themselves as the first professionals who can identify students' mental health problems, they feel that they lack the knowledge and skills to do their job properly. students in this regard (Mazzer, and Rickwood, 2015).

The professional standards drawn up by the Institute of Education Development for teachers of preschool education (IED, 2017) and primary education (IED, 2016) list, among others, some indicators for the skills that the teacher must possess to support the growth and development of the student for achieve the well-being of students. Specifically, Standard 1 (Implementation of the code of ethics) defines: *the teacher creates a positive environment that conveys the basic values of democracy* (IED, 2017, p.7). In Standard 7 (Acceptance and respect for diversity) in its description it is stated: *The preschool education teacher affects the quality development of all relationships within the classroom.....* (IED, 2017, p. 17). Yes, in this standard it is defined as follows: *the teacher identifies children who have a low self-esteem* (IED, 2017, p.17). While in Standard 9 (Physical Environment) the teacher is required to*: use classroom management techniques and positive discipline that promote self-control and self-discipline* (IED, 2017, p.21). This indicator description is the same as Standard 3 (Creating an inclusive environment) for the primary teacher. While in Standard 4 (Acceptance and respect of diversity) for the primary education teacher, the following are defined: *4.2.6 is an intensive observer of students' relationships and actions in lessons and in extracurricular activities; 4.2.7 tactfully intervenes in a relationship between children when he sees that the situation is deteriorating; 4.2.8 promotes the development of an atmosphere both social and rich in ethical values* (IED, 2016, p.13). Of course, taking care of the student's well-being is very important, but only a teacher who owns his own well-being can do this. However, in the current standards, there is not a single line about the teacher's awareness of his mental health, even though we think this should be a professional obligation.

The experience with the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted once again, and very strongly, the importance of people's health and especially mental health (Rajic et al. 2024). We

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realized that we may face similar situations again. This means that the teacher of the future must be much better prepared to be, first, very strong himself. For this we need, as Podolsky and his colleagues (2016) point out, a very strong preparation of educators, which would influence not only to increase the quality of teaching, but also to avoid the thought of leaving the profession by the teacher.

Based on the discussion above, at the institutional level, we would recommend the establishment of a center for psychosocial support for students, as all interviewed students reported experiencing high levels of stress, especially in the first semester of the first year, but also continuing thereafter. Special attention should be given to students coming from other cities who experience added stress due to separation from family and financial problems, accommodation issues, transportation, and adaptation to the university environment. On the other hand, academic staff should raise awareness of the important role they play both as educators and in the academic achievements of students, as well as direct influencers on the quality of students' lives due to their contribution to improving the classroom atmosphere and managing relationships in the auditorium. Furthermore, there is an evident need for the University to collaborate more intensively with both the central government and local authorities to facilitate the construction of dormitories for students coming from other cities and to find a solution to improve transportation conditions for all students, although these indicators are not directly related to the programs, they directly influence the quality of well-being and mental health of students.

In this way, in the institutional level is also recommended the revision of the psycho-pedagogical course programs in all higher education institutions that offer teaching programs, using the curriculum map in order that the knowledge that should be offered to mental health of teaching students, to be systematized and organized deliberately and with attention to both the mental health of the teacher and the student. Likewise, since students use the media to a considerable extent, as was also found in our study, it should be seen as a priority orientation on media content that teaching students need, to be formed in terms of mental health. Pedagogical practice should be seen as "*a golden opportunity*" to understand, apply and analyze reflectively together with the mentor teacher and the leading pedagogue, the entire knowledge base that the students of the mental health teaching programs receive. In particular, simulation situations should be observed and created for strategies to cope with stress and burnout for themselves and to help colleagues, but also students who experience psychological problems. But also on scientific data we prove the connection of well-being with the academic performance of students, and not only. For example, short intervention programs for university students for college gratitude, which are easily applicable and not high-cost, have been very effective for increasing the well-being of students (Tolcher et al., 2022).

The study identifies the need for further qualitative studies. First to understand in depth how the curriculum is preparing students to be ready to maintain themselves in terms of mental health. Second, to understand the effects of pedagogical practice regarding the fusion of theoretical knowledge with the practical skills that our students must possess in caring for their own and students' mental health. Thirdly, to understand how we can further increase the well-being of our students during their studies, so that their journey towards the teaching profession becomes not only a valuable but also an interesting experience and

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transforms our students into refined human beings. The question we pose here for future teachers is the same question that Professor Gert Biesta also posed, who says: *"How to become educationally wise?"* (Biesta, 2012, p.8).

At the national level, we suggest that the time has come to update the teacher's standards, both for the pre-school teacher and for the primary education teacher, making not only a copy and paste of the standards of other countries in Europe. We think that reflecting and learning from the experience of the distance learning period, as well as recommending that the standards be based on the problems faced by Albanian schools, reflecting on the research findings of Albanian researchers. We suggest adding to the teachers' standards the skills on recognition and self-management of mental health by the teacher as a professional obligation and not only to set standards on how the teacher will support the students. The aforementioned discussions and scientific evidence in Albania speak of teachers who, even in a difficult situation with their health, continue to provide educational services. The job is not only to conduct a mental health screening and remove from the system those who do not meet the criteria of satisfactory mental health to be a teacher, but to prevent the degradation of the education workforce by educating generations of new educators with care for well-being of himself and the students. Prevention is much better and less expensive in social terms, even in economic terms. And who better to do this than the Faculties of Education?

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Acknowledgments

The Representation of Middle Class in Chinese Magazine:
A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, 1995-2021

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Abstract

The discourse of the middle class, which was encouraged by the government and promoted by the media, has become a dream and inspiration for the general public in China since the 1980s. This study employs a multimodal critical discourse analysis framework to examine the representation of the middle class in print advertisements from 1995 to 2021 in a Chinese magazine. van Leeuwen's Visual Social Actor Network and Socio-semantic Categories are adopted to examine both the visual and linguistic data. The focus is on how such representations relate to the reproduction of class inequality and cultural hegemony in China. The findings suggest that the middle class is represented as a homogenous group of consumers, centered on heterosexual Chinese male adults, urban intellectuals and white collars, who are endowed with high cultural capital and the power to consume. The discussion argues that this homogeneous representation legitimizes the ideology of consumer culture, which is responsible for the establishment and reproduction of social stratification through consumption in China.

Keywords

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Introduction

Although globally popular and generally well-defined, the term 'middle class' in China is set within much ambivalence and controversy. Whether there is a middle class and how it should be defined remain a hot issue for debate. According to Li (2010), there are at least three major perspectives: the government describes the social group as 'the middle-income stratum' on the criteria of income and size and is committed to building a financially healthy society through the expansion of its size to include 55% of the population by 2020 (Goodman, 2014a). A different perspective comes from the sociologists, who usually define the middle class based on occupation and therefore favor the term 'the middle strata' in an effort to reduce the sense of class antagonism (Anagnost, 2008). The size of the middle strata ranges from 25%-50%, depending on different criteria adopted by different sociologists (Goodman, 2014b). The third perspective comes in the form of public opinion. It seems that the general public is more familiar with the general terms 'middle class' or 'petty bourgeois', which were initially derived from exposure to the media, particularly advertisements for luxury goods. Chinese perceptions of the middle class are mainly intellectuals, managers and white-collar workers with economic security, cultural superiority and exquisite lifestyles (Zheng, 2007).

It is worth noting that the media representation of the middle class, with its association of high income and high consumption as discussed above, is by no means representative of the ordinary Chinese people in the middle of the socio-economic hierarchy. This kind of representation reflects the lifestyle equivalent to the upper middle class in developed countries, which only accounts for less than 10% of the Chinese population (Li, 2013). Furthermore, the middle class in China is far from a homogenous group, with private entrepreneurs and individual business owners being far less represented than intellectuals, managers and white collars. Also, there is a complex issue of the under-representation of women (Shao et al., 2014), the elderly (Wang, 2013), and the LGBTQ+ groups (Wang and Ma, 2021) as members of the middle class. In light of this, Goodman (2014b) argued that the middle class in China is more of a discourse than a social structure, encouraged by the government to stimulate economic growth and consumption while serving as a mediator for the increasing inequalities between the very rich and the poor.

In the Chinese context, previous research has shown that the middle class is generally portrayed as a positive and ambitious group who are particular about tastes and lifestyles. Advertising often stereotypes the middle class as consumer animals, obscuring the fact that they are also independent individuals and citizens with social responsibilities (He, 2009). This body of research suggests that the media has been instrumental in constructing an 'imagined community' that not only binds its members together but also provides a powerful source of motivation, driving people to fulfil their aspirations to become middle class (Guo, 2014). Advertising, as an important means of information, provides and distributes a symbolic system of consumer signs to construct middle class lifestyles and distinguish the middle class from other classes. While the middle class, as readers, establish and consolidate their class identity in their consumer imaginations by reading the media-guided lifestyles (Wang, 2009). Middle class culture is constructed around consumer culture, elite culture and professionalism (Shen, 2008).

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This study attempts to discover the multimodal strategies in the discursive construction of middle class in magazine advertisements in China, with a focus on the interaction between the visual and verbal text in the production of meaning. It is a diachronic study focusing on a specific period in the history of the Chinese advertising industry, from 1995 to 2021. CDA is used as the theoretical framework to explore the dialectical relationship between the representation of middle class in advertising and its broader context, reflecting the underlying ideologies and power relations that are promoted in society. It is hoped that the results of the study can contribute to a broader understanding of the middle class discourse in China.

1. The emerging middle class in China: the social-political context

To study the middle class as a discourse is to see it as a socially constituted reality and place it in a situated and contextualized communicative event (Fairclough, 2013). Two phrases are crucial to understanding the emergence of the Chinese middle class: between 1949 and 1979, and after 1979. China has been a society that pays great attention to the social hierarchy since ancient times. 1949 was the year of the founding of the People's Republic of China. The country was built through a proletarian revolution guided by the scientific socialist ideal of the Marxist tradition (Dong, 2018). Class is a central concept in Marxism: class distinction means the exploitation of one social group over another. Therefore, the political goal of Marxism is to eliminate such exploitation by realizing a classless society (Hunt, 1974). A series of measures were taken to reshape and dismantle the social structures that generate socio-economic differences. As a result, the upper-middle class, such as the national bourgeoisie and small business owners, were eliminated; other members of the middle class, such as the petty bourgeoisie, were transformed into peasants or the working class (Li, 2013). Before the Reform and Opening-up in 1979, social stratification was based on family background and political status. Every citizen was officially categorized and provided with a specific class identification (Goodman, 2014a). Furthermore, a household registration system called hukou divided the Chinese people into two categories—urban and rural. Under such a system, people with rural hukou were called peasants, even though some of them were not engaged in agricultural work. Most Chinese must live where they were born, and peasants could not move to urban areas or enjoy the benefits of urban life (Goodman, 2014a). Meanwhile, people with urban hukou were further divided into workers and cadres. There were significant differences between these two identities in terms of income and social prestige (Li, 2019).

The Reform and Opening-up in 1979 was marked by the introduction of market forces into the socialist economic system. The government loosened the class relations and social structure by replacing the class-struggled-centered principle with the development--centered principle (Anagnost, 2008). When class background ceased to matter as much, new criteria based on income, wealth and property were introduced as the main criterion of social stratification (Zhou and Chen, 2010). Sociologists have agreed that the development of the socialist market economy resulted in considerable inequality and increased stratification in China (Goodman, 2014a; Li, 2019).

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In 1997 the World Bank reported that China saw a significant increase in its Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, rising from 0.28 in the 1980s to 0.49. This change is noteworthy for two main reasons. Firstly, the rate of growth is unprecedented in any society. Secondly, it indicates that economic inequality had reached a critical level, typically identified as 0.4, which poses a threat to social stability (Anagnost, 2008). It was during this period of transition that the new generation of middle class was born. They are generally young, highly educated, and possess professional skills. Many are employed in foreign-funded companies and in burgeoning industries like finance, insurance, information technology, and other high-tech sectors. They often reside in major cities and have high purchasing power.

The emergence of the middle class was not only a natural outcome of the market economy but more importantly depended on government support (Anagnost, 2008). The middle class is seen politically as the foundation of social stability; economically as a key driver of consumption and domestic demand; and culturally as the main body of modern culture (Li, 2019). Therefore, cultivating a consumption-oriented, professional middle class has been a major goal of the Chinese government in recent years. The move to identify the middle class and promote a middle class society has been legitimized by a variety of political discourses. Instead of using the term 'middle class', the government has opted for 'middle-income stratum' and 'middle-income group' to define the social group based on income. The ambivalence in terminology reflects the ideological ambivalence in the perception of social class in China (Dong, 2018). The new language address social inequality without assuming social antagonism (Anagnost, 2008). The current political discourse of the 'China Dream' aims to build a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way by 2020. A key indicator is to expand the share of the middle-income group and gradually form an olive-shaped distribution pattern (Li, 2015).

But how much income makes a person middle class? Given the large disparities between urban and rural areas, and among regions, it is difficult to arrive at a national standard. This ambiguity about the term and its standards makes it difficult for the Chinese middle class to develop a shared class identity, class consciousness, or class culture (Li, 2010). Based on a study of the social and self-identity of the middle class in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Nanjing and Wuhan, Shen (2008) pointed out that nearly 80% of the respondents' perception of the middle class is influenced by the media, especially advertising. The media portrays them as individuals who can afford spacious homes, luxury cars, work in modern office buildings, and vacation abroad. Such representations provided concrete examples of the middle class status based on consumption. Consequently, in the Chinese context, the term middle class has lost its political implications and has taken on popular meanings developed through the media (Miao, 2017).

Since it was the advertising industry that introduced the concept of the middle class to Chinese audiences in the late 20th century (Miao, 2017; Shen, 2008), it is argued that the representation of the middle class in advertising is a key element in understanding the dynamics behind the discursive construction of the middle class in China.

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2. Theoretical Framework

This study employs multimodal critical discourse analysis as the theoretical framework to investigate how the middle class is depicted in print advertisements in magazine and how such representations relate to the reproduction of class inequality and cultural hegemony in China. A multimodal analysis is necessary when it comes to analyzing advertising texts as it highlights the distinctive functions of both visual and linguistic texts and, more importantly, 'the joint effect of all modes combined to make meaning' (Jewitt et al., 2016:140).

2.1. Visual Social Actor Network

The Visual Social Actor Network (van Leeuwen, 2008) is used to answer the question of 'how is the middle class depicted'. This network is widely used to discover how people are visually represented as 'others' in racist discourse and other culturally prejudiced discourses (van Leeuwen, 2008). It starts with the question of who is excluded and who is included in the representation. This is important because not acknowledging the existence of certain kinds of people means that they are unimportant or irrelevant to the discourse. Social actors are categorized according to their biological features, such as age, gender and race, and cultural features such as occupation. The aim is to see which categories are excluded, and which categories are more frequently depicted as the middle class. It then examines the types of actions in which social actors are involved and the cultural connotations associated with these actions. Finally, it explores whether the social actors are represented as homogenous groups or as specific individuals. van Leeuwen (2008) argues that the strategy of showing people as homogenous groups denies their individual characteristics and differences.

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2.2. Socio-semantic Categories

In addition to visual representation, a classification of referential strategies based on van Leeuwen (1996)'s Socio-semantic Categories is used to examine how the middle class is linguistically represented in the advertising text. A number of categories are identified to classify people with different ideological effects, such as synthetic personalization, individualization, functionalization, relational identification and classification, which we explain below.

3. Materials and Procedures

This research is designed as a diachronic study (1995-2021), focusing on the representation of the middle class in the print advertisements of San Lian Life Week magazine, hereafter referred to as Life Week. The magazine was chosen for its prominence, relevance, and audience. Life Week is a leading news magazine in China. As its slogan suggests – a magazine and the lifestyle it advocates - it aims to promote a particular way of life to its readers. More specifically, it directly targets the emerging middle class in times of social transition (Qi, 2006). As one of the most effective ways for advertisers to present

their products to the emerging middle class, Life Week provides a large number of advertisements with a variety of products for this study.

We selected 1995 as the starting point for data collection because it marked the magazine's founding year, and 2021 was when our research began. Additionally, this period coincided with the Chinese advertising industry's significant growth and depoliticization after years of neglect. Scholars have subsequently mapped four phases in China's advertising development, closely linked to economic and political liberalization and reform (Yao and Weng, 2019):
Rapid development (1992-2001)
Full development (2002-2009)
Before digital transformation (2010-2014)
After digital transformation (2015 to present)

The data encompassed all four of the above-mentioned phrases, offering a comprehensive picture of the representation of the middle class in magazine advertisements. We employed stratified sampling and the constructed year approach to select the sample for the research. Following Riffe et al. (1996), the data were first stratified into four sub-periods corresponding to the development of China's advertising industry, with each sub-period treated as a constructed year rather than a calendar year. Constructed year sampling involves randomly selecting one issue from each month, for example, one issue from January, one from February, and so forth (Riffe et al., 2019). Using SPSS software's sampling function, we randomly selected 48 issues across the four constructed years, with 12 issues per year. Only commercial advertisements with human images are collected. Ultimately, our corpus comprises 291 print advertisements with 38,158 Chinese characters.

Table1. Distribution of print advertisements in Life Week magazine in four constructed years.

Month	1st Constructed Year (1995-2001)		2nd Constructed Year (2002-2009)		3rd Constructed Year (2010-2014)		4th Constructed Year (2015-2021)	
	No. of Issue	Date of Publication	No. of Issue	Date of Publication	No. of Issue	Date of Publication	No. of Issue	Date of Publication
January	1/2001	1/1/2001	3/2005	17/1/2005	1/2014	6/1/2014	3/2021	18/1/2021
February	4/2000	29/2/2000	6/2008	25/2/2008	7/2013	18/2/2013	8/2019	25/2/2019
March	5/1999	15/3/1999	10/2004	3/3/2004	11/2011	14/3/2011	11/2021	15/3/2021
April	7/2000	15/4/2000	14/2002	8/4/2002	15/2010	12/4/2010	17/2020	27/4/2020
May	19/2001	7/5/2001	17/2002	6/5/2002	18/2012	7/5/2012	19/2015	11/5/2015
June	22/2001.	4/6/2001	23/2005	27/6/2005	22/2013	3/6/2013	25/2018	25/6/2018
July	13/2000	15/7/2000	25/2006	10/7/2006	26/2012	2/7/2012	26/2019	1/7/2019
August	17/1999	30/8/1999.	31/2003	4/8/2003	33/2014	18/8/2014	35/2016	29/8/2016
September	17/1997	15/9/1997	37/2004	13/9/2004	38/2011	19/9/2011	37/2017	11/9/2017
October	37/2001	17/9/2001	37/2009	12/10/2009	41/2012	15/10/2012	41/2016	10/10/2016
November	22/1999	30/11/1999	44/2005	28/11/2005	45/2014	10/11/2014	48/2020	20/11/2020
December	24/1999	30/12/1999	51/2004	20/12/2004	51/2010	20/12/2010	50/2018	17/12/2018
Total	50		92		98		51	

4. Findings: visual and linguistic representation of middle class in advertisements

4.1. Visual representation

In this section, the human images in the advertisement are coded into different categories suggested by van Leeuwen's (2008) Visual Social Actor Network. We argued that these models are representative of the media-constructed image of the middle class because they are portrayed in contexts and settings that are relatable to many middle class individuals. There are ways in which people can be visually categorized: whether they are categorized in terms of biological or cultural characteristics (van Leeuwen, 2008). Biological categorization refers to characteristics that are 'biological', 'in the blood', and hence 'ineradicable' (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 146). Age, gender, race and ethnicity are such characteristics that are closely related to the study. Cultural categorization is signified by means of standard attributes. They connote values and associations attached to a particular sociocultural group. The characteristics in the choice of representation are considered to be cultural, and therefore changeable (van Leeuwen, 2008). In this study, we focused on occupation as the main attribute. We relied on the verbal and visual cues to judge the occupation and counted the number of occurrences of different occupations. The aim of this section is to see which categories are excluded, and which categories are more frequently used in the advertisements to depict the middle class.

Table 2. Summary of the biological categorization

Biological Categorization	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Adult	242	83.2%
	Children	17	5.8%
	Elderly	2	0.7%
	Adult and children	27	9.3%
Gender	Male	117	40.2%
	Female	66	22.7%
	Male and female	101	34.7%
	Cross-dressing	2	0.7%
Race and ethnicity	Asian	200	68.7%
	Caucasian	63	21.6%
	Caucasian and Asian	16	5.5%

The results of the biological categorization analysis (see Table 2) show that, the majority of the represented participants are adults (n=242, 83.2%), exclusively male (n=117, 40.2%) and Asian (n=200, 68.7%). In terms of cultural categorization such as occupation (see Figure 1), almost 40% (n=115) of the advertisements do not specify the occupation of the person portrayed. For example, in the Samsung advertisement in Figure (1), although the man's occupation is unknown to us, his body shape, clothing, hairstyle, and preference for cultural goods (in this case, the latest mobile phone) all point to an upper-middle class lifestyle. Here social stratification works through consumption, not through occupation.

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In addition, the most frequent occupations are celebrities, professionals and technicians, office workers and managers, typical middle class occupations with high cultural capital.

According to the findings of the visual analysis, it can be said that the representation of the middle class is rather homogenous, centered on the heterosexual Chinese male adult, urban intellectuals and white collars, endowed with high cultural capital and the power to consume. They are portrayed as the desirable 'new normative figure of citizenship' (Anagnost, 2008, p. 499). Their individuality may seem to disappear behind what categorized them— the clothes, the make-up, the status accessories (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Meanwhile, the middle class tends to be portrayed in social activities associated with leisure rather than work. 78.9% of the advertisements showed the middle class in non-occupational settings, such as at home or outdoors, engaged in leisure activities such as shopping, traveling, and exercising. Only 21.3% of the advertisements depicted the middle class in occupational settings and engaged in actions associated with work, suggesting that leisure is far more prominent than work in constructing the self-identity and group identity of the Chinese middle class. In other words, the middle class is defined by money spent, not money earned. The Mini advertisement in Figure (2) shows a group of people camping in the countryside: they have pitched their tents on a mountaintop, are sitting around a table with wildflowers and various delicacies on it, drinking hand-brewed coffee and red wine and chatting away. As the advertising slogan says: 'One car, one family. Mini lovers travel together', suggesting that anyone who could afford to buy a Mini belongs to the same group. This finding is consistent with the assumption that leisure is an important form of postmodern consumption (Guo & Wang, 2009), and that the media play a crucial role in disciplining the emerging middle class into a lifestyle that centered on leisure and consumption. The consumerist ideology prevalent in the advertisement challenges traditional Chinese values that emphasize frugality, contentment and hard work (Zhu, 2018).
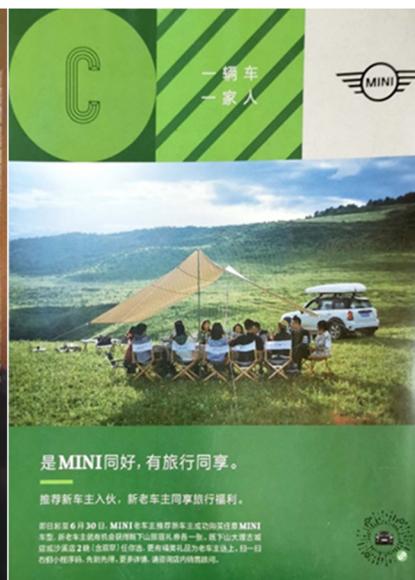
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Figure (1): Samsung   **Figure (2): Mini**

Exclusion

Bourdieu (1984) used the term 'classification struggle' to clarify the symbolic function of everyday consumption, and only through these constant, reciprocal acts of social classification that social collectives are born. The homogenous representation of the middle class in advertising inevitably raises the question of exclusion: who is represented and who is not. As can be seen from the data, older people are underrepresented, despite the high respect for this group (Michael et al., 2017) and their growing population in China. They are often backgrounded and marginalized in the frame, stereotyped as grandparents or golden agers (Eisend, 2022). Women are less represented than men and are more associated with domestic products, with 22.7% of advertisements featuring female models compare to 40.2% featuring male models. Gender role stereotyping, a common strategy in advertising, ignores the significant progress women have made in China and reflects their disadvantaged position in society (Zhang et al., 2009). Local models are preferred to foreign models. Advertisers believe that it is easier for audiences to identify with local models than with foreign ones, and that too many Western faces could alienate the Chinese audiences (Shao et al., 2014). This preference for Chinese models and spokespeople reflects a nationalistic tendency to preserve a distinct Chinese identity in a global market (Zhao and Belk, 2008).

The LGBTQ+ groups are excluded from representation, except for the creation of comic effects. Looking more closely at the gender categories, it is found that the representation of the middle class in advertising adheres to the rigid boundaries of the gender binary. The only two cases of cross-dressing are found in the advertisements for Xelibri, which was launched in 2004. The advertisement was set in a near future where everyone has the same face. The actor played several roles all by himself: in Figure 3, he was the groom, the father, the photographer, and cross-dressed as the bride and her mother; in Figure 4, he was dressed as a schoolgirl, but star posters with his images were all over the wall. The Chinese version

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Figure (3)-(4): Xelibri

is almost identical to other versions around the world, except that the language is translated into Chinese. Cross-dressing is used here as a creative strategy to achieve the effect of being eye-catching, funny, and fashionable. The exclusion of the LGBTQ+ groups is a direct result of the institutional power exerted by the government, which reflects its relative indifference towards the LGBTQ+ community. The Chinese government introduced two separate bans to restrict verbal and visual representations of homosexuality in public media: in 2008 and 2016, banning the media coverage of homosexuality and the depiction of homosexual characters in TV shows, respectively (Wang and Ma, 2021). Under the guidance and censorship of the government, any 'deviant' sexuality described by the Chinese media is seen as a betrayal of mainstream culture (Zhang, 2014).

Exclusion also occurs within the members of the middle class. According to Goodman (2014a), the middle class is fragmented and heterogeneous, including a variety of private entrepreneurs, individual business owners, professionals and technicians, and office workers. However, only white collars (n=32, 10.7%), professionals and technicians (n=50, 16.7%) are frequently represented in the data, other members of the middle class such as private entrepreneurs and individual business owners (n=4, 1.3%), who may earn similar income are seldomly represented. Meanwhile, the middle class lifestyle is an urban phenomenon that completely excludes rural residents. Unlike white-collar workers, professionals and intellectuals, who tend to be urban and highly educated, the composition of private entrepreneurs and individual business owners is more complex, with a high proportion of rural residents, and the level of education also varies. It is a common phenomenon in China to show distain for the wealthy landed gentry who usually have bad taste (Dong, 2018). The practice of everyday consumption serves as a 'vehicle through which they symbolize their social similarity with and their social difference from one other' (Weininger, 2005:483). The exclusion and distinction from people with bad taste manifested in the representation of the middle class. The individual business owner Uncle Wen in Figure (5) is a tea plantation owner who sells expensive handmade black tea. He wears a traditional Chinese Tang suit with a dragon pattern, which shows his identity as a member of his time-honored tea-making family. The tea set he uses also signifies good

Figure (5): He Yi He

taste and refinement. In the advertisement, he is represented as a tea expert rather than an individual business owner.

Not acknowledging the existence of certain people means that they are unimportant or irrelevant to the discourse (van Leeuwen, 2008). In the advertisements, the representation of the middle class is deliberately and selectively controlled by the magazine and the advertiser to serve their own interests. It is safer for advertisers to follow social conventions by using stereotypical and easily identifiable representations than to challenge them (Shao et al., 2014). Advertising effectiveness is achieved through messages that are quickly understood by the audience. The prevalence of heterosexual Chinese male adult representations reflects the male-centered, heterosexual hegemonic and nationalist trends in the Chinese society, and the representations of urban residents with high cultural capital and the power to consume legitimize the ideology of the consumer culture, which is responsible for establishing and reproducing social stratification through consumerism.

4.2. Linguistic representation

The linguistic analysis data comprises 38,158 Chinese characters extracted from 291 advertisements. The analysis aims to examine how the middle class is referred to and thus represented in the advertisement. van Leeuwen's Socio-semantic Categories (1996) are used to identify the main referential strategies. This process was conducted using MAXQDA, a computer-assisted analysis tool, to ensure a reliable statistical calculation of the frequency of each strategy. The analysis revealed 11 categories containing 981 words or phrases, with some categories exhibiting low frequencies. Table 3 displays the most prevalent strategies, which account for 93.6% of the total.

Table 3. Frequency and percentage of different referential strategies

Referential Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
pronouns	616	62.8%
functionalization	103	10.5%
individualization	66	6.7%
identification: relational	74	7.5%
identification: classification	59	6.0%
Total	**918**	**93.6%**

Pronouns

The most frequent referential strategy in the verbal text is the use of pronouns (n=616, 62.8%). Further analysis in Table 4 shows that the middle class is most often addressed directly as 'you' and its honorific, while the advertiser as the corporate 'we' (Fairclough, 1989). This referential strategy is what Fairclough (1989) calls synthetic personalization, which is widely used in advertising to construct the relationship between the advertiser and the consumer. Synthetic personalization involves a number of linguistic strategies,

such as addressing the audience directly as 'you' and using imperative sentences (Patrona, 2015), as shown in Example (1). The strategy has an 'interpellation or hailing' effect (Althusser, 1971: 90): although the pronoun 'you' is used by the advertiser to address to the mass audience, people who read it feel that it applies to them specifically. The middle class audience are conceptualized as a homogeneous group of consumers who will presumably buy the product. Meanwhile, the first person plural 'we' also ranks high in the list of pronouns. As shown in Example (2), the text producer is personalized as the spokesperson for the whole company by using the pronoun of the corporate 'we'. The company is given a unique image through the choice of image, vocabulary and syntax. In this way, both the consumer and the company are individualized and personalized.

> Example (1): Want to bring the wonderful film and television experience on your lap? Get yourself a laptop based on Intel Centrino mobile computing technology (*Life Week*, 28 September 2005).
> Example (2): What can we do for you? NEC mobile phone, know you and I (*Life Week*, 20 December 2004).

Individualization and Functionalization

The second and the fourth most common strategies are functionalization (n=103, 10.5%) and individualization (n=66, 6.7%). Individualization refers to the referential strategy of referring to social actors as individuals. Functionalization refers to the situation where social actors are categorized in terms of identities and functions that they share with others, in terms of what they do, for example an occupation or a role (van Leeuwen, 2008). In many societies where individuality is highly valued, whether people are nominated as individuals or assimilated as groups makes a big difference in critical discourse analysis (van Leeuwen, 2008). As in Example (3), the verbal data show that the advertisements tend to individualize celebrities and elites. They are not only nominated by name, but also functionalized by their occupation, such as brand ambassador, world champion, expert and professor.

> Example (3): IBM ThinkPad. The world's most innovative thinkers' choice. Prof. Xiaoming Gu, social anthropologist and historian, editor-in-chief of The Wisdom of China. (*Life Week*, 4 August 2003).

The middle class is also individualized and functionalized as customers of the products. While their names may not be widely recognized, their occupations are typical of the middle class, such as engineer, designer, manager, and doctor. Example (4) features a Besturn automobile advertisement that introduces three owner representatives, each identified by name and occupation as a professional or technician These individuals symbolize the target consumers of the product. Through their first-person perspectives on the products, they create a sense of belonging and relatability with the audience, making them easily persuadable. The strategy of individualizing and functionalizing the middle class increases the credibility and the persuasiveness of the product.

> Example (4): 'What you see is a brief shock, but for me, it is a long exploration and practice'-- Besturn owner Zhang Jian: 39 years old, information engineer of China Aviation System (*Life Week*, 20 December 2010).

Identification

Similar to functionalization, identification is another referential strategy to categorize individuals. It occurs when the social actors are defined not by what they do, but by what they are (van Leeuwen, 2008). Two types of identification are found in the advertising text: classification and relational identification. Classification involves categorizing social actors based on major societal categories such as race, gender, class, and age (van Leeuwen, 2008). In verbal text, social actors are often classified by age (e.g., children, babies, teenagers), gender (e.g., men, girls), and race (e.g., Asian), as seen in Examples (5-7). These advertisements highlight a particular classification because they are directly targeted at them.

> Example (5): Give baby better protection. Please use a child safety seat (Life Week, 18 August 2014).
> Example (6): Men love black, pure black Nokia 8210 launched with passion (Life Week, 7 May 2001).
> Example (7): 65°Golden Ergonomics: Lying and sitting bathing angles designed for Asian (*Life Week*, 15 October 2012).

Relational identification represents the social actors in terms of their personal, kinship or work relationships with one another (van Leeuwen, 2008). In the data, individuals are primarily categorized by kinship and personal relationships, as illustrated in Example (8). This is achieved by using possessive pronouns to indicate these relationships, such as your family, son and daughter, friends and lovers. Furthermore, social actors are classified as consumers based on their business relationship, such as customers, owners, users, partners or members. Example (9) demonstrates how individuals are addressed as if they are already established consumers.

> Example (8): China Merchants Bank VISA Platinum Credit Card understands your needs and brings you and your family an 'extraordinary travel experience' (Life Week, 18 February 2013).
> Example (9): The Siemens always thinks one step ahead for its customers (Life Week, 3 June 2013).

Discussion

The research employs multimodal critical discourse analysis to examine how the middle class is represented in magazine advertisements both visually and linguistically. The visual analysis reveals that the representation of the middle class is rather homogenous, focusing on the heterosexual Chinese male adult, urban intellectuals, and white-collar workers. The linguistic data indicates the same conclusion of homogeneity--the middle class is most often addressed directly as *you*, portraying them as a homogenous group of potential consumers. From the representation, we can see that the middle class is not much about politics or a social structure in the way that classes have previously been understood in China, and instead took on popular meaning evolving around consumption.

The homogenous representation of the middle class brings to light issues of inequality and exclusion. To begin with, there is the problem of stereotypical representations of age and

gender. Older individuals, women, and LGBTQ+ groups are underrepresented, with the latter often only used for comedic effect. Next, only white-collar workers, professionals and technicians with higher cultural capital are often represented, while other middle class members such as private entrepreneurs and individual business owners—who may earn similar incomes—are rarely represented. Moreover, the middle class lifestyle is an urban phenomenon that completely excludes rural residents. This exclusion suggests that being a middle class is exclusive, leading people to believe that they are one and the same. Higher education and urban citizenship (especially home ownership) are key symbols of the middle class, a determinant of social status.

Beyond marketing considerations such as target audience and market appeal, explanations for such representations can be found in the sociocultural contexts closely associated with the middle class discourse in China. For political reasons, the existing political landscape has constrained their room for action, giving the middle class the dual characteristics of being 'the vanguard of consumption and the rearguard of politics' (Zhou and Qin, 2010: 85), suggesting a group of consumer animals who lack passion and a sense of engagement in politics and public affairs. To minimize the political connotations of 'middle class,' the government adopted the term 'middle-income group,' encouraging people to stratify society based on income and consumption. For economic reasons, the rise of the Chinese middle class parallels with the expansion of globalization, cultivating a consumer market and corresponding values, lifestyles, and behavioral patterns based on consumption. Consumption, once synonymous with waste, extravagance and decadence in the Mao era, became a key part of the country's development strategy to expand domestic demand and stimulate the national economy (Zhou and Chen, 2010). For cultural reasons, the stereotypical depiction of gender indicates that traditional patriarchal social norms and the established gender hierarchy persist in Chinese society, despite the significant advancements in women's rights and awareness in recent years (Zhang et al., 2009). Additionally, the preference for local over foreign models highlights a nationalist tendency in China, emphasizing the promotion of traditional culture, values, and modern achievements (Zhao and Belk, 2008). Lastly, the exclusion of rural residents and lifestyles reflects the urban-rural dichotomy in China. By presenting urban life as modern, affluent, and ideal lifestyles, rural life—with its significant disparities in income, living conditions, and quality of life—is considered irrelevant to the discourse.

The impact of the representation of the middle class is far-reaching. First, it has played a crucial role in cultivating and facilitating the consumer culture in China, which is responsible for establishing and reproducing social stratification through consumption (Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas and Isherwood, 1980). The consumerism ideology highlights the symbolic nature of goods and the fluidity of identity. Goods are now defined not only by their functionality but also by the meanings they convey (Baudrillard, 1998), and social identity becomes a matter of choice, where one can assume any identity through the purchase and display of certain consumer goods (Jameson, 1983). Thus, we are defined not by our traditional, given identities such as class, gender or age, but in terms of what we buy and what values we hold. The focus on fluid identities through consumption, according to Machin and Richardson (2008: 208), 'took us away from the concrete reality about economic exploitation and unequal access to resources and power'. While the inequalities may appear to stem from differences in cultural capital and consumer power, they are, in

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reality, a result of deep-seated structural inequalities that restrict access to resources such as employment, education, and urban residence (Anagnost, 2008).

Second, the homogenous representation implies that only those with money to spend, higher education and urban citizenship are recognized as 'the legitimate culture' (Bourdieu, 1984: 199) -- desirable, worthy, and distinguished. It is a matter of concern that such associations may lead to cultural hegemony for the aspiring middle class in China, limiting their perceptions of what it means to be middle class and what they should aspire to in their own lives. Evidence of this can be found in the rat race in education and the obsession with homeownership. In China, education is often equated with social status. Not only middle class parents but also working class parents spare no effort to invest in their children's education, to avoid leaving them in a disadvantageous position (Anagnost, 2008). Children are caught up in test scores and school admission, as if that is the only way to succeed. Meanwhile, home ownership is recognized as a key indicator of middle class status and as a prerequisite for marriage. Many people take out large mortgages, resulting in long-term debt and financial strain for families. People labelled as middle class do not necessarily feel a sense of belonging. Instead, they may experience feelings of deprivation and insecurity due to the perceived expectations associated with the middle class status (Miao, 2017). Their disposable income does not allow them to afford the carefree middle class lifestyle depicted in the media or that they aspire to.

Finally, the homogenous representations of heterosexual Chinese male adult, urban intellectuals, and white-collar workers reproduce and reinforce existing social hierarchies and inequalities related to gender, education and regional differences. In China, there were huge gaps between urban and rural areas, among coastal and inland regions. Moreover, there were increasing income disparities among age groups, and unequal job/educational opportunities between genders (Goodman, 2014a). These kinds of representations have marginalized women, LGBTQ+ groups, private entrepreneurs and individual business, and the rural population, overlooking their increasing presence in the middle class. They shape not only how the public perceives these social groups but also how these groups perceive themselves. By setting a narrow normative standard of identity, these representations perpetuate a limited and often misleading image of what it means to be middle class.

Conclusion

While this study emphasizes the power of the media in shaping representation of the middle class and the ideology of consumer culture in reproducing social stratification, it could further explore the agency of consumers in negotiating and contesting the dominant discourse. Today, Chinese young people have found it increasingly difficult to afford houses, expensive cars and other middle-class necessities. Some feel so intimidated by the responsibilities of the consumer culture that they even reject marriage and parenthood. The discourse of the middle class, once the aspiration of the younger generation, has been overshadowed by other popular discourses of resistance, such as *tang ping* (literally meaning 'to lie down'), which urge Chinese young people to reject the so-called 'rat race' and instead choose alternative lifestyles, such as minimalism, as a form of resistance to consumerist values.

This article aims not only to explain why the representation is the way it is, but also to help people consider what alternatives there might be. The findings of the study suggest that the representation reinforces existing inequalities and neglects the heterogeneity within the middle class. This stereotypical and narrow representation is not beneficial to the formation of the middle class identity. It is hoped that the advertisers and the media producers will promote a more inclusive representation of the middle class, including women, rural residents, and other occupational groups. We also hope to enhance readers' critical awareness of the middle class discourse, and the influence and consequences of advertising communication on society and culture. This will enable them to rethink their own identities and notions of the good life, rather than defining it solely in terms of the consumption portrayed by the media.

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Book reviews

Book review of "Acceptance, Participation, Solidarity. The Importance of the Interdisciplinary Approach" by Ewa Dąbrowa, Warsaw 2024, 200 pp.

Maria Czubak[1]

Abstract

Book review of "Acceptance, Participation, Solidarity. The Importance of the Interisciplinary Approach" by Ewa Dąbrowa, Warsaw 2024.

Keywords

disability studies, interdisciplinary approach, social inclusion, human rights, people in crisis

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Acceptance, participation, and solidarity are three issues guiding the work of those working for inclusiveness. Each of them plays a relevant role in the process of creating an inclusive society in which each person's voice is heard and considered equally. These concepts are inseparable from the issue of social exclusion. Social exclusion is a complex problem that requires an interdisciplinary approach to find solutions. Such an approach makes it possible to take a broader view and better understand the needs of disadvantaged groups. This perspective is also promoted by the book Acceptance, Participation, Solidarity. The Importance of an Interdisciplinary Approach.

Published in 2024 the book frequently references the current political situation and contemporary social issues. The authors of the various chapters from different countries offer a multidimensional view of the situation of socially excluded people. At the same time, it highlights the universal nature of inclusiveness while highlighting locally relevant issues.

The book consists of two parts. They are preceded by the book's opening chapter written by Anna Odrowąż-Coates. This chapter introduces a multidimensional reflection on the possibility of promoting social inclusion and presents the issue from economic and social policy perspectives. The author also points out existing tools that should be used to promote social inclusion.

The first part of the book, *Inclusiveness as a "Hidden Treasure" of Disability Studies*, presents the situation of people with disabilities concerning various dimensions of social life. The topics such as art therapy, vocational and social rehabilitation, and preparation for independent living, are described. Research on the leisure activities of adults with mental disabilities is also presented with conclusions encouraging the promotion of active creativity over passive consumption of content. The issue of multiple discrimination, to which people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable, is also addressed, along with the description of legislation regarding the possibility of marriage for people with intellectual disabilities. Some of these topics do not immediately come to mind when thinking about people with disabilities. This shows the scale of the changes that need to be made. People with disabilities should be seen by society as individuals like non-disabled, rather than being seen as their disabilities.

The second part of the book, *From Solidarity to Integration: Challenges in Interdisciplinary Studies*, focuses on social exclusion for reasons other than disability. Two chapters depicting the performance of universities were an important part. One examines the inclusion efforts of Ukrainian universities as perceived by students with war trauma, while the other presents ways in which universities in Ukraine and other European countries include students with disabilities in the educational process and social life. Other chapters explore topics such as application of capability theory in addressing the problems of excluded groups or ways to support prisoners during and after serving their sentences, the treat oof suicide affecting people from disadvantaged groups and the role of prevention among such individuals.

Although all chapters deal with social inclusion, the thematic scope is much broader. Some measures are deemed to enable and accelerate the building of an inclusive society. People from excluded groups are portrayed as potential capable creators in charge of their own

lives, rather than passive receivers of the actions of others. At the same time, the authors do not shy away from sad realities. The chapters point out that the chance of quickly moving away from the reproduction of exclusionary stereotypes is minor. They also emphasize the need for ongoing improvement of actions that have been already considered effective.

The book promotes the use of an interdisciplinary perspective in addressing on social exclusion and fostering an inclusive society. The authors explore several thematic areas, highlighting in the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon and the necessity of taking comprehensive measures in favour of disadvantaged groups. As a result, the book becomes a call to action, advocating for various ways to strive for a more just world. At the same time, it reveals wide research perspectives within the intersectional paradigm of important and extremely complex social issues. Intersectionality, which emerged from the critical approach, allows for the identification of the invisible phenomena and uncovering of the multifactorial determinants of social inequality and exclusion. This should be considered the basis for social change in regards of acceptance, participation and solidarity.