

Classes Under Covid-19: An Examination of College Under a Pandemic

This paper will be an examination of college life under the COVID-19 global pandemic. It will entail my autoethnographic data crossed referenced with data ascertained from my online Reddit and Facebook posts. Such data will allow for confirmation and support of my personal experiences as well as differing viewpoints and circumstances. From here I will employ the theories of autoethnography, hashtag ethnography, and the ideas of *habitus* and *fields*. Thereby, strengthening my own experiences with COVID-19 by applying the qualitative data that is present.¹ The autoethnographic notes will be used to provide personal perspective to the matter while the hashtag ethnography will act as my participant observation in the digital landscape.² Lastly, this paper will look at the potential changes of *habitus* and *fields* during a time of crisis; exploring also how they could be affected coming out of one.³ This will allow for an in-depth view of the student experience during the COVID-19 pandemic to be presented in an enthralling and aphoristic manner.

Habitus and Fields: An Overview

“Habitus refers to a person’s taken for granted, unreflected— hence largely habitual—way of thinking and acting.” (Monaghan 2020, Slide 29) This is the idea that this *habitus* structures structure in life by forming/formulating the ideas/understandings of a person’s understandings, body, behavior and attitude. “A field is an area/domain of social interactions held together by a “stake at stake” such as the definition of legitimate rule, good taste, useful economic knowledge, or of good family life.” (Monaghan 2020, Slide 29) *Fields* are the ideas that refer to understandings that are taken for granted typically being associated with the

¹ Reference: (Jarman and Monaghan 2017) and (Lubin 2017)

² Reference: (Bonilla and Rosa 2015)

³ Reference: (Anne Leander 2008)

mundanities of life like riding the bus or vacuuming. In subsequent paragraphs we will apply the pre-pandemic ideas of these constructs and compare them to the current ones that are reflected in my notes and collected data.

Classes in Cyberspace: The Pressures and Disappointments of Isolationism

This section will detail my journal highlights until I have collected my data in about mid-April. I have divided it as such, so I can assess data correlation and because there is a tone shift after around April 25th that is more positive leaning. To set the scene, prior to spring break, the students of Northern Arizona University received a letter stipulating that we were to move to online classes after spring break. I had been following this a while and knew what was coming. (It is worse than I initially anticipated.) I had made the necessary preparations and brought my stuff down only to find things had become increasingly stressful.

“March 25th Today is the first day I begin writing. I do not know how useful this will be but hopefully this will allow for some interesting commentary. Maybe I will call it The Apocalypse Survival Guide or something. I dunno.” (Schroeder 2020, pg.1)

Initially, I doubted the usefulness of this tool, and I would soon be proven wrong.

“April 6th Damn. Stuff is really heating up out there. Had to help teach my mom how to teach online today. She is doing alright. I just wish I had more time in the day as it seems that I just keep getting slammed with work. It is like the professors are thinking we ain’t going to learn anything. I know that this is kinda my fault having taken 8 courses, but I didn’t anticipate this.” (Schroeder 2020 pg.4)

This is when I began to feel the increased stressors of everything going on around me. Suddenly my schedule began to become rooted and I had to contend with the fact I was falling behind.

“April 10th My Mom has begun making masks as my Dad still has to go to work. We are buying in bulk now to minimize contact and I have yet to leave the house as I don’t wanna get anyone sick. My friend Bryce has finally moved out into his new place so not having to constantly deal with him has made my life easier. It is not that I hate him. It is just I have been doing nothing but work and it is hard to find alone time in a house with 6 people and 3 animals.” (Schroeder 2020 pg.6)

At this point I began recognizing that part of my stress was helping my friend get a job and assist him in his endeavor to join the Marines. As this was on top of the increasing amount of schoolwork, network outages, and family requests were becoming draining.

“April 12th GOD DAMN THIS INTERNET CONNECTION! I CANNOT GET ANY OF MY WORK DONE! IT CUTS OUT EVERY FU#\$%NG MINUTE! AND NOW I HAVE TO DO ANOTHER PAPER! GREAT!” (Schroeder 2020 pg.6)

I was becoming choleric. I had to get my work done, and nothing was working. This was especially stressful as I had to finish many group projects that necessitated that I be online. Furthermore, I was to present two posters in the Undergraduate Symposium, and I could not get half my sources. These network issues would not be resolved for a few days and over those days I would become increasingly agitated. My worries about falling behind surfacing, wondering how I was going to fix this.

“April 14th I am sinking. The walls are closing in and I am sinking. This morning I found out that my Internship was cancelled. Months of work gone. In an instant. I cannot even apply for this again. It was my in and now that plan is shot to hell. This means that I am going to lose my scholarship too. I don’t have work for the summer and don't have a plan.” (Schroeder 2020 pg.8)

Apathy and despair are the emotions that best describe my situation on that day. I felt robbed. Scared and angry I retreated inward and tried to deal with my issues by being productive. This only kind of worked as I neglected to keep up with the journal resulting in a four-day gap.

“April 18th I have a plan. After much research I have decided that I will be going to get a MPA. [Master of Public Administration] This degree will allow me to specialize myself in narrowing my broad base I am building so that I am more hireable. It will also provide to me security by giving the education necessary for lateral movement. As for my internship I have spoken with professors and administration and it looks like I may be able to keep the funds [4.5k] if I can procure another internship by semester's end. There is hope. Lastly, I was able to get out of my lease with the Suites. This saves me about a grand and a whole lot of headache. Now I just gotta get through this semester and I will be good.” (Schroeder 2020 pg.10)

This is when I begin to shift gears and bite the bullet. It is at this point I begin laboring through my backlog of missed discussion boards, papers, and labs. It is at this point that I start working out again. I begin to accept I cannot change the circumstances, but I can change my reaction to them.

Reddit and Facebook: Digital Case Studies

Student Responses	Reddit	Facebook
Likes/Upvotes	13	5
Positive Comments	1	0
Negative Comments	7	1
Neutral Comments	2	1

Figure SEQ Figure 1* ARABIC 1 (Pictured Above)
Table of Student Responses

To adequately understand the feelings, I was/am having I opted to collect data through hashtag

ethnographic methods. In this case I created two postings on two different social media sites and requested that college students tell me about their experiences with COVID-19 and how it has affected them. Thereby, utilizing the online sources to provide data in comparison to my response to COVID-19. The data is primarily divided up into the positive, negative and neutral positions. To accomplish this, I examined the comments for word association positive words like good used in a positive context were designated positively. Negative comments that used strong words or swears were consequently labeled negatively. While neutral comments were noted to be the least divisive and understanding posts; typically characterized by a gentler tone and thoughts directed more at the specifics of their issues.

The Facebook posting I created was posted on April 12th with the following

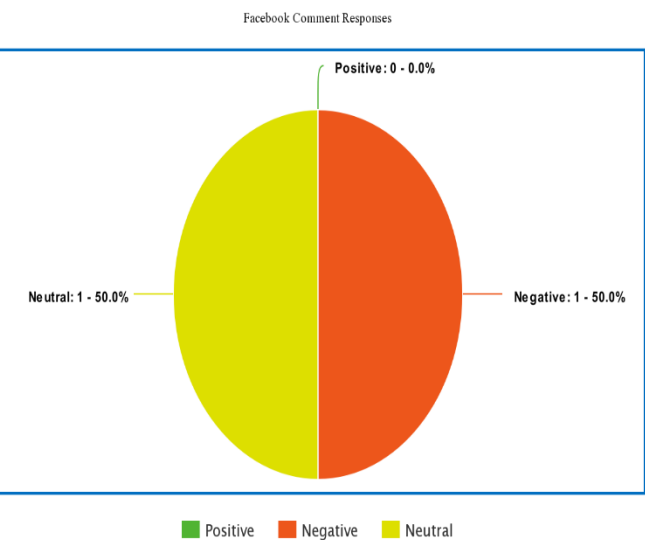


Figure SEQ Figure 1* ARABIC 2 (Pictured Above) Facebook Comment Responses

message: “Hey guys, I am gathering qualitative data from College Students on how they have been affected by COVID-19 for an ethnography I am making. If you would like to help, please tell me your thoughts in the comments below.” (Schroeder 2020, Facebook) This post unfortunately received little traction, but I was able to acquire some data from two friends of mine Seth and Wyatt. Seth Twyman responded with this negative comment, “To be honest it kinda stupid I’ve got

automotive classes and they expect me to get a 3/16 brake line pipe and pipe flarer and not to mention a pipe bender. I honestly think that since they closed the colleges they should find a way to help the students supposed to be doing their hands on learning and

the students who have straight online classes.” (Schroeder 2020, Facebook: Seth’s Post) [Seth is attending school to be an automotive tech at San Juan College.] Being that he is going to school for the trades this made sense as kinesthetic learning is difficult to convey in the online format. While he does not want to blame anyone, his frustration of unfair expectations is understandable.

The other individual Wyatt Justice responded with this more neutral comment, “Some teachers aren’t as effective at teaching as they are found forced into an unfamiliar situation where others feel the need to assign more work to compensate for the lack of face to face communication.” (Schroeder 2020, Facebook: Wyatt’s Post) [Wyatt is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Arizona State University.] His problem is the same unreasonable expectations, but he chooses to address something more, what he thinks the problem is. This problem is their overcompensation in an effort to make sure we are still learning and are prepared for the next year or graduation. He is not accusing them directly as opposed to Seth who appears to be at least at an unconscious level. This is something that I concur with as I have been struggling with issues of overcompensation in most of my coursework as well. I believe that in this case our *habitus* and *fields* have shifted. This is due to our changing in social construction or *fields* which has produced a new *habitus* of apathy towards class work and teachers overextending responses.

The Reddit post I made was far more successful in its endeavor to comprehend the current changes in students. Having a total of 10 responses, I ascertained that 7 were negative. 2 were neutral, and 1 was positive. Accordingly, I will be taking a post from each section for cross-referencing purposes. To begin with the outliers the positive post by the Yellowjacketboys said “I know I’m in the minority here and I might get downvoted but I’m doing much better with

classes online now. Since I have so much free time, I'm able to get ahead for some classes and can focus more on assignments knowing that I have no plans to hangout with friends since everyone is quarantined. The only downside is that I feel like I'm not learning anything and that all my work is just "busy work" but at the same time that makes it easier for me." (Schroeder

2020, Reddit: Yellowjacketboys Post)

This provides an interesting paradox as this post suggests that the overcompensation of the teachers that is loathed by Wyatt and Seth could prove prudent for this Redditor. So, with the shift in *fields* as opposed to apathy this individual felt more focused and started doing better than they were before. A

contrary view than that of most of the polled people.

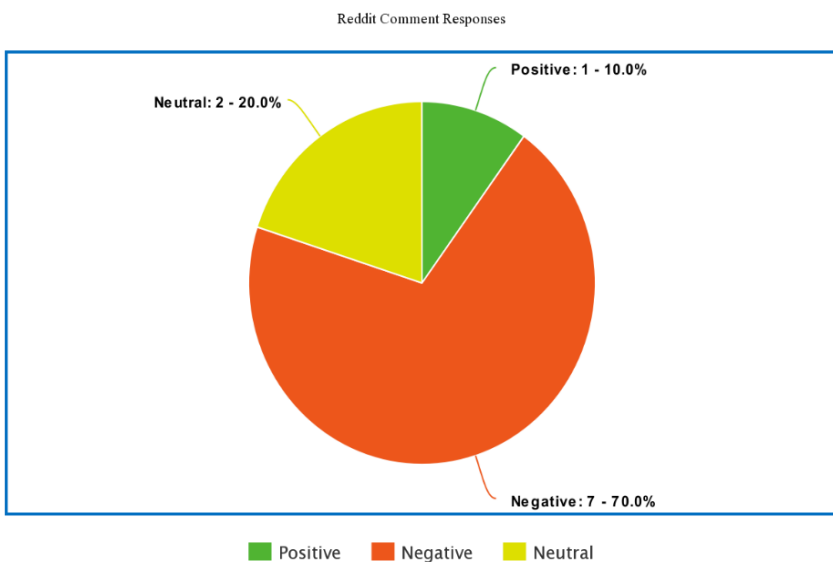


Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 3 (Pictured Above)
Reddit Comment Responses

Pro tem, the more neutral sounding posts captured the sentiment that apart from social distancing nothing changed. With many stating something akin to "Online student already, working full time (now from home without pants!) , no kids in the home. No change in life." (Schroeder 2020, Reddit: SensesNumbed Post) This provided an interesting viewpoint as it meant that despite the changes in *fields* that there were no changes in *habitus*. This runs opposite to the more negative posts like cts_253's "I've been doing online all semester so that has not changed since the school moved online. I was exposed to COVID-19 on Friday so I have to work from home for two weeks. Right now I'm struggling with boredom. My wife and I have both realized we have been drinking more so we are trying to go back to our normal drinking habits. It

is more of a strain mentally than anything else.” (Schroeder 2020, Reddit: cts_253 Post) Which showed that the change in *fields* had negatively impacted the user. In this case causing him and his wife to supplement their lives with drinking or their new *habitus*. I cannot agree in either of these cases though as my *habitus* is not the same to these folks, despite the shared *fields*. Something that I would come to recognize as I was reading back through my journal.

Perseverance and Positivity: It’s Not So Bad Jack!

As I was reading my journal, I noticed a dramatic shift in tone around the 25th of April.

“April 25th Today I helped to build a garden with my family. We are growing some food in case we cannot get the necessary goods from the market. I think it will be more than that, though, as I enjoyed helping put it together.” (Schroeder 2020, pg.12)



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 4 (Pictured Above) Brock Schroeder (Me) assisting in building the Schroeder family garden.



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 5 (Pictured Above) Kaleb Schroeder in his gaming chair.

This shift continued as I saw the subsequent entries: “April 28th Mom has informed me that she is making masks for donation to the Navajo Nation. She plans to make 150 of the things. Kaleb [my brother] is working hard on trying to graduate high school, and I couldn’t be prouder. Today his graduation gift came, and he looked so giddy. It was nice to see a smile on a face that has appeared so sullen lately.” (Schroeder 2020, pg.14)

“April 30th Went to the store with dad today and things seem to be calming down. I find myself joking with him more. Perhaps this is due to lower stress or

something. All I know is that I have been feeling better lately. Today I am happier than I was yesterday.” (Schroeder 2020, pg.15)

“May 1st Today is my last journal entry. I don’t quite know what to write here. When I set off on this project my goal was to track my thoughts and feelings and I feel that I have accomplished this. As I flip back and forth through the pages, I am reminded of how angry, how scared I had been. The world had ended it seemed and no one cared. There are still things that tick me off like those protests that were happening today, but I think that most of my emotional response has passed. For now, I accept the fact that the only thing I can do right now is adapt to the situation best I can and hope for the best. That’s fine by me.” (Schroeder 2020, pg.15)

A Students Conclusion

This paper accomplished a lot. By doing an autoethnography of my time during COVID- 19 I was able to practice anthropology in a manner like that of Mycie Lupin. Allowing me to convey my thoughts and feelings in a genuine manner. Helping me to develop and communicate the idea that despite the changes in the world that it keeps turning and that as such we should keep trying despite what life throws at us. That and the fact that if our currency fails toilet paper will be a suitable replacement. As for hashtag ethnography with this, I was able to better understand the issue by applying an analysis of the positive, negative, and neutral results of my posts. So in reference to the question of“ [If] the study of an event through social media a return to a previous era of “armchair anthropology”? Or is hashtag ethnography the next logical step in an anthropology of the 21st century, one that has become increasingly concerned with the ontological implications of digital practices (Horstand Miller



Figure SEQ Figure 1* ARABIC 6 (Pictured Below) Protester for Reopening Arizona from the Apache Junction Protests of May 1, 2020 (Longhi 2020)

2012)?” (Bonilla 2015, pg.5) I say it is. That it has to be, because the current circumstances require it to be so. Lastly, throughout this paper I played with the idea of *habitus* and *fields*. Using it to better understand the motivations of not only myself but of the people responding to my posts. This idea gives me a theoretical basis in which to gauge motive in posts. Thusly aiding me in the discernment of the data, with all three of these theories being utilized in conjunction to create an anthropology of social isolation and its effects on the college student population.

The results of my findings showed me that most college students are disgruntled at the predicament we are currently in. They (including myself) generally suffer feelings of apathy, anger, and fear brought on by the immense stress of overzealous professors and social distancing culture. Typically, this will manifest itself in negative behaviors like binge drinking, overeating, and procrastination. All behaviors that serve to self-sabotage the student as the days pass. The best cure for these behaviors that I have found is to change one’s disposition and compel oneself towards enjoyment with those around them in alternative ways. Instead of partying, have a video game tourney on the internet or instead of eating more to fill some void call a friend on the phone. By doing these things the college student can mitigate the effects of prolonged self-isolation; allowing for them to function at a more normal or even better level than that of their normal state.

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