Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter movement and protests continue to occur around the country. Although there have been many issues regarding Black lives, the current movement is to bring awareness about how difficult it is to be a Black/African American in the United States. I will be sharing a few examples that will explain the current tragic events that sparked the Black Lives Matter movement. To begin with, there is Ahmad Arbery. Ahmad Arbery had decided to go on a jog in his neighborhood as he had done many times before. He left his house thinking he would return home to proceed with life as he had done so many times in the past. He would never get to return home because he was shot while jogging by men in his own neighborhood ensuring that the community is sage. There was a man in the community that had filmed the shooting taking place, but never contacted the police about the situation. The video was blowing up about the situation which is how people had known about the Ahmad Arbery death. While all of the facts were not in favor of the three men justice wise, all three men were acquitted of their charges and are still roaming the streets.

Next, there is Bre’onna Taylor, a young woman hoping to contribute to our country by becoming an Emergency Medical Technician. One night while sleeping in her bed, she was fatally shot by police officers. The officers were acting on an unlawful act known as a no knock warrant. It was illegal, the man the police were initially looking for was already in a prison cell. The reason the police men had starting shooting was the action of Bre’onna boyfriend that had thought the police were intruders since they hadn’t identified who they were. The had grabbed his registered gun and started shooting, and this was when the police had been shot Bre’onna in her sleep. The policemen involved in the shooting were free of all charges.

George Floyd was a loving husband, and a great father. While at a store, the worker was falsely accused of having a fake 20 dollar bill. As a result, the store owner called the police to intervene. The police showed up and handcuffed Floyd and placed him onto the street. George Floyd was on the ground with a knee on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds knowing that George Floyd wasn’t able to breathe. The officer knew that Floyd could not breathe because Mr. Floyd had yelled out over 23 times that he could not breathe. After the death of George, the 20 dollar bill was ruled out to be a false accusation. None of the officers that were present were charged with murder, yet in fact they too were acquitted of all charges.

In all three situations, those Black individuals did not do anything wrong and were living life. These three Black individuals were doing no harm and they were killed at the hands of police officers. The death of George Floyd had a world wide effect on the black community and had started the many protests that are still happening. The protests were peaceful, but they were considered riots. They weren’t riots until the police started pepper spraying, throwing gas, or shooting rubber bullets. The only people doing harm and hurting people were the police. The police made the situation worse, not better.

This kind of treatment towards the black community has been going on for plenty of years but it was a lot worse centuries ago. The purpose of the protests is to empower our community, to have our voices heard, and have everyone understand that we should be getting the equal justice we deserve. We cannot continue living in a country that does not believe we all should be treated equally. I thought that the police were supposed to keep us safe, but instead, we are afraid of them. Protests will continue until there is no longer a division of treatment because of the color of one’s skin.
Feminism and the Men's Rights Movement

Feminism and the Men's Rights Movement

The feminist movement was formed in the late 18th century, a movement to fight for women’s voting rights. This was the first wave of feminists, the second wave fought for more job freedom for women and the ones who followed fought even further for job/voting rights for women of all races. Today, there are discussions about whether feminism is needed and what they fight for in the 21st century.

The men’s rights movement started in the mid-1970s as a response to inequality against men in some aspects of society. Many believe there shouldn’t be a men’s rights movement because they believe men aren’t oppressed as women. Even if that is true, experts say there are still gender inequality issues against men who also need to be addressed.

Feminism has been an ongoing debate for years. Members from Gloria Steinem all the way to Emma Watson and even Mark Ruffalo define themselves as feminists. However, others like Lana Del Ray, Carrie Underwood, and Lady Gaga refuse to refer to themselves as feminists and they don’t believe in the feminist way. Similarly, the men’s rights movement includes members like Janet Bloomfield and Suzanne Venker.

To describe feminism it’s a range of social movements to support the equality of women with men. Emma Watson, a British actress and activist delivers a speech at the United Nations HeforShe campaign in 2014. She made sure to advocate that being a feminist does not mean you are against men, “...the more I realized that fighting for women’s rights has too often become synonymous with men-hating. If there is one thing I know for certain, is that this has to stop. Feminism by definition is the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of political, economic, and social equality of the sexes.”

You might be wondering why would anyone oppose gender equality? Shouldn’t everyone be a feminist? Why would anyone be an MRA (Men’s Rights Activist) if they don’t want equality for women?

In contrast to Watson’s speech where she has stressed the importance of the equality of sexes with regards to feminism, another woman by the name of Cassie Jaye makes sure to put herself in a man’s perspective who supports the men’s rights movement in a TedTalk she gave in 2017, “There was one Man’s right activist that said to me, ‘just walk outside and look around, everything you see was built by a man’...what would be the gender reverse scenario? Maybe a feminist saying, ‘just look around, everyone you see was birthed by a woman’...is it anti-male? I don’t think so, I think it's acknowledging our unique and valued contributions to society.” Jaye proposes an interesting concept to make sure people understand both sides of a story. Is the Men’s rights movement opposing women? Is the feminist movement opposing men? Are some feminists going too far and blaming men for everything?

To further describe the men’s rights movement it consists of a variety of groups who focus on general social issues and specific government services which structurally discriminate against men and boys.

Cassie Jaye spent a year interviewing MRA’s for a documentary she was filming. Jaye goes on to say, “…in looking back at the thirty-seven diaries I recorded that year, there was a common theme. I would often hear an innocent and valid point a men’s right’s activist would make, but in my head, I would add on to their statements a sexist, or anti-woman spin, assuming that’s what they wanted to say but didn’t.” So what are these movements fighting for?

There are discrimination issues against both men and women. An issue feminists usually cover is the gender inequality in jobs. Within the same jobs, calculated by the Controlled Gender Pay Gap, it has been proven that for every dollar a man makes, a woman makes 97 cents. African American women make less than 97 cents and Hispanic women make even less (In the USA). In a year, a woman would make around 2,000 dollars less than a male with the same job.

While Feminism addresses these issues against women, many feminists say it does not mean they oppose helping men’s issues. In her 2014 speech for the HeforShe campaign, Watson says, “I’ve seen young men suffering
from mental illness, unable to ask for help for fear it would make them less of a man. In fact, in the UK suicide is the biggest killer of men between twenty to forty-nine… I’ ve seen men made fragile and insecure by a distorted sense of what constitutes male success. Men don’t have the benefits of equality either.” While there is only a small portion of feminists who believe they should overpower men, Watson shows us that feminists should be fighting for equality between both men and women, and to fight to break gender inequality issues for all genders.

An issue that men’s rights activists usually cover is gender inequality in custody battles. In a custody battle fathers usually ask for 50% custody, in contrast, mothers ask for 80% custody and they almost always get it. Many times the mothers turn out to be abusive and still get higher custody over the child. While the men’s rights movement focuses on mainly issues against men, many MRA’s report that they do not oppose helping women’s issues.

There is an abundance of human rights issues affecting both women and men. A lot of people describe feminists as trying to take power from men and that they are implying women are the only victims. This idea is being constantly reinforced by fake news and the media. With the same idea, men’s rights activists are thought to be against women’s rights and only see women as objects. They’re thought to believe that men are the real victims and not women. Logically, the public would believe in these statements because that’s what is being portrayed on the news, in articles, on social media, and on the mainstream media. The bottom line about these movements is that it is not a contest about who is more oppressed.

The types of feminists and MRAs trying to make one gender superior to the other are the ones that make these movements seem like something that they’re not. Both movements are fighting for one thing, gender equality in every aspect of the world no matter what your race is, what you look like, and whether that be politically, economically, or socially. Each movement focuses on one specific gender’s issues, making many people think of these two movements as rivals as if one only supports women and the other only supports men.

In a National Survey conducted by the Washington Post the results to the question, “Do you think these words describe feminism in the United States?” The word was “Angry” and 43% of people said “yes” (3% had no opinion and 54% said no). The media takes a big part in portraying what feminism is about. In a lot of cases feminists are described as angry, man-hating, and power-seeking. The reality is most feminists have come out to say that’s not who they are and what they believe in.

Some may even see feminists as obsolete, for example, an anti-feminist by the name of Lily Allen states that, "Feminism. I hate that word because it shouldn’t even be a thing anymore. We’re all equal, everyone is equal so why is there even a conversation about feminism? What’s the man’s version of feminism? There isn’t even a word for it. There’s no reason for it. Man-ism? Male-ism. It doesn’t exist.” The “guidelines” for being a true feminist are not clearly defined in the modern-day and neither are the guidelines of being an MRA. Lily Allen goes on to say that she believes we are all equal and even though she and most people want to believe that, laws, stereotypes, and social standards are still keeping the two genders from becoming equal.

"It's about labeling. For me, feminism is bra-burning lesbianism. It's very unglamorous. I'd like to see it rebranded. We need to see a celebration of our femininity and softness.” Gerri Halliwell had said. What happened to make these movements seem so far from their original form? The answer is the media.

Comments on the internet about feminism uphold the fact of how misinterpreted the feminism and men’s rights movement are, “It’s true some feminists are blind to their privileges and get defensive when a man brings up struggles men face that women do not.” From a feminists point of view, “Advocating for women’s rights should not infringe on men’s rights” (Anonymous).

After researching both movements I can safely say, the more social media and the news try to interpret feminism and men’s rights activists, there will be less of a clear distinction of what these movements are trying to succeed in society. All over the world you will see women and men who call themselves feminists or MRA’s, yet they’re own opinions are not the same as others claiming to believe in the same movements. You will see some Men’s rights activists who still agree with feminism, but you will also see MRA’s who don’t.

Pat Robertson’s views on feminists are astonishingly different from that of Emma Watson’s or even Cassie Jaye, “The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians.” Today we see articles titled “How Feminists Control Men” or “Feminism has Ruined Women” or even, “Feminism is witchcraft.”

For over 200 years the public has been told feminists hate men and for the whole time the men’s rights movement has been a movement, the public was told they oppose women’s rights. Reading Pat Robertson’s quote vs. Emma Watson’s quote shows us how much differently people can view the same topic because of the different articles, social media posts, and news available to them.

Restating an Emma Watson quote mentioned earlier, “...the more I realized that fighting for women’s rights has too often become synonymous with men-hating. If there is one thing I know for certain, is that this has to stop. For the record, feminism, by definition, is the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities.
It is the theory of political, economic, and social equality of the sexes.” As the world continues to develop, both men and women rights activists (MRA’s and Feminists) wish that people would be more educated in what they’re fighting for, so our global community can reach gender equality.
The Reality of Being a Minority in the Las Vegas School System

In 2019, 43 percent of the revenue brought in by the Las Vegas Strip came through gaming(1). Las Vegas thrives off the idea of chance: the roll of the dice, the thrill of the horse race, the electronic symphony of the slot machines. But for many students attending Las Vegas Academy of the Arts, every day of school is a gamble, and the odds aren’t in their favor.

In light of the worldwide protests in the fight to abolish systemic racism, students at the Academy have been using social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter to share their stories of discrimination and favoritism on-campus.

“The first posts about LVA had to do with racism in every department,” an anonymous student said of the beginnings of the movement. “It slowly progressed to the rampant and known sexual assault at the school, and then progressed to the mental health and drug aspects.”

A particular subject of these allegations has been Mr. Jordan Salinas, the principal at the Franklin County Academy of the Arts. Multiple petitions can be found on the website change.com calling for the principal to be fired. The most popular petition, created by an anonymous group known only as “Franklin County Academy Testimonies,” has over 2,500 signatures as of June 21st.

“[Salinas] has a past of direct conflict with student-run queer and feminist clubs,” the petition’s description reads. “It is time that this school move forward with a principal that is interested in the students’ care and learning, not focused on funding and awards.”

Principal Salinas did not respond to questions on the topic of the movement.

The discrimination and deterioration of students attending the Academy is reflected in recent data involving the school as well. A survey conducted in fall of 2019 found that white students attending the Franklin County Academy gave the school’s cultural and racial understanding an average score of 433 out of 500 possible points, whereas the black and African-American school population only gave an average of 366 points (2).

In addition to this data, the same survey found that the students’ feeling of physical safety was declining with each year the student stayed enrolled. Where 9th graders have scored their physical safety at an average 426 out of 500 points, the 10th graders have reported an average of only 396 points. This decline continues throughout the grades, with seniors giving an average score of 367 points (2).

Many testimonies of students and alumni have also been targeting discrimination via the administration as a whole, including certain teachers and often counselors. Accounts of rape and sexual assault reports being swept under the rug as well as violations of personal rights are among the most common.

“It doesn’t matter what you go through at Franklin County Academy. The administration exudes hypocrisy at every level,” one student’s recalling of events via a Twitter post stated. “If you make admin’s radar, you will be ashamed at the way your school treats its most vulnerable students. The LVA way, to me, will always be one of enforcement above rehabilitation.”

Other segments of this confession recalled the blatant ignorance of reported sexual assault cases, as well as threatening students with expulsion over false accusations. Though these reports had been piling up for years prior, there was a surge in the demand for justice along with the worldwide Black Lives Matter movement.

The most infamous of these reports, as well as one of the most shocking, is that of Mr. Levi Ramos. Ramos, a former theater teacher of Puerto-Rican descent at the school, recalled his experience with prejudiced administrators and staff in a FaceBook post. The post quickly took off, being spread over other social media platforms by students, teachers, and parents district-wide.

“[Assistant Principal] Sandra threatened me with ‘insubordination’ my FIRST week because I was wearing my Yankee hat to work. My opinion on this will NEVER change. WEARING A HAT HAS NO BEARING ON MY ABILITY TO TEACH THEATRE. I said it was a cultural thing. She said she understands mexican culture because
she grew up around it in Texas, but it wasn’t allowed in school. I told her I wasn’t mexican.”

This encounter is one of many which the post describes, including students being brought in to give information on Ramos, as well as ignorance of student concerns over unfair treatment of the teacher.

“Over 50 students complained to the superintendent I was being treated unfairly by the staff at Franklin County Academy. They even formed a group unifying against Jordan and Sanra and Linette who were trying to assassinate my character from the MOMENT I became a teacher.

They even threatened not to do the [mid-year Thespian’s Choice] show the day I was removed.

Nothing was EVER done.”

Statistics from a fall survey show a general uncertainty about the cultural and linguistic competence of the school as well. Out of 500 points, Black and African-American students only rated competence at an average of 366, in comparison to an average rating of 433 points by Caucasian students (2).

So it’s clear there’s an issue with the school’s administration. But how can the problem be fixed? What has to happen to make students and teachers, regardless of race or gender, feel safe and welcomed at Franklin County Academy?

“[Administration] needs to be completely reevaluated as a whole,” suggests Mariana Davidson, one of many students who have shared their Franklin County Academy experiences. “They need to also have more compassion for the students for more than their education - they need it for their mental health and well-being as well.”

Whatever the true solution may be, what’s clear is that the goings-on at Las Vegas Academy are more than what’s shown on the surface. As the district goes into an incredibly modified school year with uncertainty, it’s important not to forget the troubles of systemic racism within Franklin County Academy and the entire district.

“You have to understand. It’s not normally big acts of racism. Those usually end in horrible ways that make national news,” Ramos wrote at the end of his post. “It’s the minutia of it. It’s the way they come at you behind closed doors. It’s the way they look at you or talk to you. It’s the way they cater to other white people over you.”

The struggle for representation and equal treatment of students of color is a worldwide societal issue, but in the Clark County School District, it’s part of a much bigger issue. If the administration at Franklin County Academy expects to improve student and staff morale, their best bet is on black.
"Eat the Rich": A Phrase to Combat Inequality during the Pandemic

"Eat the Rich": A Phrase to Combat Inequality during the Pandemic
When the people shall have nothing more to eat, they'll eat the rich." This quote by Jacques Rousseau exemplified the struggles of the starving in response to a famine during the 18th century. At the time, “the rich” were King Louis XVI and the rest of the aristocracy. While the monarchs led lavish lives, the common people struggled to find moldy bread to feed themselves. Despite the Third Estate, the lowest class, making up 98% of the population, its members had little to no representation in the government. The Third Estate were living in horrible conditions and were suffering from famine, malnutrition, and taxation without representation. After years of that treatment, the Third Estate revolted in 1789.

The French Revolution still persists to this day as millions have lost their jobs and thousands have died since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. According to the Common Wealth Fund, nearly 49 million people have lost their job and more than 1.6 million have died. While billionaires have gained over 1 trillion dollars total since the start of COVID 19, there have been millions impoverished because their companies are not paying them adequate wages. The phrase “Eat the Rich” has re-emerged as a response to this extreme wealth inequality at the fault of the rich, the billionaires. The fact that billionaires gained trillions of dollars since the beginning of the pandemic highlights the most prominent issue, wealth inequality.

COVID-19 has only emphasized how poorly workers are being treated at the hands of mass corporations owned by billionaires. Amazon, the largest ecommerce company, is speculated to be paying their workers inadequate wages. The COVID-19 crisis has outlined the need for better wages and conditions. Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon, has the funds to pay his workers non poverty wages yet doesn't do so. Seth King, a former Amazon warehouse worker described the poor conditions he was forced to work in.

“You spend 10 hours on foot, there’s no windows in the place, and you’re not allowed to talk to people — there’s no interactions allowed,” he said. “I got a sense in no time at all that they work people to death, or until they get too tired to keep working. After two months, I felt I couldn’t work there and maintain a healthy state of mind.”

The unsafe conditions and poor wages Amazon workers received has caught the attention of former 2020 presidential candidate and Vermont Senator, Bernie Sanders. Sanders made a petition and an online campaign to rally against Amazon in 2018. Sanders accused Amazon of paying their workers poorly. Amazon has had a reputation for years on reports of poor workplace conditions and wages. Sanders, an advocate for the working class, outlined his issue with Amazon.

“Thousands of Amazon employees are forced to rely on food stamps, Medicaid and public housing because their wages are too low. I don’t believe that ordinary Americans should be subsidizing the wealthiest person in the world because he pays his employees inadequate wages.”

Amazon responded to this denying any claims of poor treatment. Although Sanders’ efforts against Amazon were in 2018, the efforts against large corporations are needed now more than ever. Right now, poor working conditions have only been exacerbated due to the pandemic. Yet, some billionaires are still hoarding their wealth and clinging to tax hideouts.

Sanders outlining Bezos’ wealth, “[I hope Bezos] will explain why he thinks it’s acceptable that he makes hundreds of millions of dollars a day while Amazon employees are grossly underpaid and forced to rely on government programs to survive.”

No billionaires could ever utilize their wealth in an entire lifetime, not even several lifetimes. Yet, they are still clinging to tax hideouts and ignoring their workers who are crying out for help. Of course, this problem is not only concerning Amazon.

The problem of billionaires paying their workers inadequate wages pertains to large companies like Walmart, InstaCart, and more. The Walton family, the owners of Walmart, have gained over $40 billion dollars since the
beginning of the pandemic yet they refuse to provide their workers hazard pay. The conditions are poor for the working class and their health is at risk due to the pandemic. Whether or not it is true that some billionaires aren’t paying their workers adequate wages, another problem still exists: billionaires have far too much wealth.

The French Revolution still persists to this day as the majority of the population is suffering due to the pandemic yet the ultra-rich like Jeff Bezos are only getting richer. It is not surprising that “Eat the Rich” has re-emerged as a response to poor treatment of workers at the fault of billionaires. Although it is not guaranteed all billionaires are treating their workers poorly, one thing is guaranteed, that there is wealth inequality in the United States.

**Works Cited**


Future of Technology and Sex Trafficking

Technology is an integral part of many lives and undoubtedly brings about innovations that further societal development. Despite its benefits, technology has increasingly facilitated sex trafficking. For instance, according to “Survivor Insights,” a summary of results from a 2018 survey on minor sex trafficking survivors’ experiences, 75 percent of respondents trafficked in 2004 or later were advertised online (Thorn 4). Technologies that allow users to exchange digital information like the Internet and online social networks also enable traffickers to control and coerce victims. However, the technology used for exploitation can become an effective tool for combatting traffickers, and it can positively transform the future of sex trafficking. Many organizations and groups have suggestions and future plans to support anti-trafficking by harnessing technology.

One of the ways technology can be helpful in preventing sex trafficking is digital activism. According to a research article called “The Rise of Mobile and the Diffusion of Technology-Facilitated Trafficking” published in 2012 by Mark Latonero, “In many ways, digital networks have lowered the barriers to citizen participation and are allowing individuals to transcend geographical boundaries and organize around global causes” (Latonero 19). Technology increases social connectedness and facilitates collaboration, which is crucial for raising awareness and advocating for different methods of sex trafficking prevention. Removing geographical barriers allows new research and educational resources to diffuse rapidly. The article also mentions how online petitions are effective in creating change. A petition on Change.org in 2010 urged Craigslist to remove its “adult services” section. The petition gained enough attention, and Craigslist shut down this portion of its website worldwide in December 2010 (Latonero 19). Another instance in which a petition was successful is in January 2011 when a campaigning site called Avaaz sent a petition with 317,000 signatures to the CEO of the Hilton hotel chain, and Hilton agreed to train all of its international employees in preventing sex trafficking (Latonero 20). While actual progress made by the companies being held accountable must be ensured, social campaigning sites like Change.org and Avaaz demonstrate the potential of using technology to expand activist campaigns. Attention and pressure from government officials, activist groups, and media outlets drive companies to evaluate their services to improve the safety of users and employees.

Furthermore, sex trafficking can be prevented through social media. Because social media is a hub for digital activism, many anti-trafficking organizations use it to raise awareness about sex trafficking issues. According to the research article, “The Rise of Mobile and the Diffusion of Technology-Facilitated Trafficking,” anti-trafficking organizations “use Facebook to share projects and developments, post relevant news stories, connect with organizations doing similar work, and highlight opportunities for action” (Latonero 21). While the article was written in 2012 and Facebook has declined in popularity, the same type of advocacy can be done on more popular social media apps. New insights on how sex traffickers and victims use social media allow law enforcement to improve tech applications and prevent sex trafficking by spreading up-to-date knowledge to the public. Additionally, Ambassador-at-large John Richmond at the opening session of the 19th Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons Conference on April 8, 2019, said in his keynote address, “Law enforcement can search the trafficker’s computer, mobile phone record, and banking information. Search warrants and subpoenas of this type of information can expose how the illegal trafficking scheme operates ... It might also lead to the identification of other traffickers and generate new cases” (U.S. Mission OSCE 1). When a trafficker uses social media, they risk leaving a digital footprint behind. This is beneficial for law enforcement officials because they can utilize this information to find victims and enforce new tech solutions. Using social media to further research about how sex traffickers operate is key to sex trafficking prevention and trafficker accountability.

Additionally, social networking sites can be used to create anti-trafficking technology and spread helpful information on sex trafficking issues through methods like ads. Many sex trafficking victims are advertised on the Internet. According to “Survivor Insights,” there was less online advertising for sex trafficking victims between 2011
and 2014. The article suggests this decrease was due to “increased monitoring and legal scrutiny of online advertising sites” (Thorn 55). Law enforcement can learn from the past and continue to use certain software after evaluating its effectiveness. They can also create new, innovative methods of identifying suspicious advertisements. In fact, “Survivor Insights” continues, “A majority of respondents who were advertised on the Internet report that they write the text of the ads themselves, and there are a variety of keywords that the traffickers have them use to signal they are young” (Thorn 55). This information can further the development of anti-trafficking technology. Law enforcement officials can examine the content of ads to search for keywords and pinpoint where the victim is. Since many sex trafficking victims have access to the Internet to write ads and facilitate the trafficker’s business, it is important to strategically put help resources on sites where victims post their ads and increase avenues for self-reporting. In addition to screening ads, technology can prevent sex trafficking by distributing Internet help ads or public service announcements that inform young people about the dangers of meeting strangers online.

Moreover, the use of apps and advanced tech tools are increasingly used for victim identification and reporting. According to a 2020 article titled “Leveraging innovation to fight trafficking in human beings: A comprehensive analysis of technology tools,” apps like Stop the Traffik “provide guidance for recognizing the signs of human trafficking and reporting concerns in confidence. Usually, apps have advanced features such as synchronizing with GPS technology which allows for pin-pointing the location of the reporting party” (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 40). Apps can lead law enforcement to where the victim is and facilitate third-party reporting. For example, businesses can integrate anti-trafficking apps during training so employees can recognize signs of sex trafficking and intervene. Advanced apps with features like photos and GPS technology can not only help law enforcement find victims but also locate high risk places that need investigation. Additionally, artificial intelligence (AI) is another tech tool that can identify victims. A 2019 report called “Human Trafficking and Technology: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities” describes how AI combats sex trafficking:

In the context of human trafficking, examples include the use of AI to identify how a child victim of sex trafficking would look when he/she is an adult, to enable autonomous machine communication with potential users of services from trafficking victims, to recognize the features of hotel rooms where victims may be held, and to identify financial transactions that may be indicative of human trafficking networks. (Interagency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons 4)

Leveraging artificial intelligence is important in creating databases to manage sex trafficking cases. It can analyze data to identify patterns among locations, faces, phone numbers, and images. Artificial intelligence can potentially compare photos of victims in sex trafficking ads to photos of missing people. As more information is collected using these different tech tools, artificial intelligence will be more integrated in victim identification.

Implementing technology to fight sex trafficking raises awareness on the issue and improves victim identification. Advanced tech tools will lead to increased examination of sex trafficking data and provide more outlets for reporting. While technology continues to be developed, it is important to emphasize the role further research and analysis plays into implementing these new tech solutions. By learning from the past, developers can improve and replicate existing technology. They must also ensure tech solutions are user friendly and consider the user’s digital capabilities and environment to avoid creating additional problems. To stop sex trafficking there must be collaboration between law enforcement officials, government officials, businesses, companies, and the general public. Ultimately, progress is being made everyday, and technology has the potential to change the future of sex trafficking for the better.
The Opioid Crisis

Used in mainstream medicine thanks to the reassurance of pharmaceutical companies in the late 1990s, opioids are a class of drugs that have become widely addictive in recent years (ASPA). Common types of opioids include morphine, oxycodone, and codeine. They are naturally found in the opium poppy plant and are notably used for their pain-relieving properties. Unlike over-the-counter drugs such as Tylenol, opioids have a different way of targeting pain. They act on one’s nervous system to soothe aches and create a sense of pleasure. For this reason, they are highly addictive. Non-opioid medications are used for acute and chronic pain. On the contrary, physicians only prescribe opioids to treat severe pain. Unfortunately, that comes with many risks. Prescribed or not, the misuse of opioids has become a worldwide issue.

Opioids are only useful when taken in appropriate doses because of their drug withdrawal symptoms. According to MedlinePlus, “Opioids change the chemistry of the brain and lead to drug tolerance, which means that over time the dose needs to be increased to achieve the same effect” (“Opioid Addiction”). While dependence on opioids doesn’t necessarily mean addiction, some individuals develop such an intense dependence on the drugs that they crave them even when they are not in pain. The most common methods of drug abuse include crushing opiate pills to snort and smoke or liquifying them to inject into a vein. Any drug addiction is dangerous because there is always a risk of overdose. Overdosing is when drugs are taken to such an extent that they slow or stop a person from breathing, leading to unconsciousness or even death.

Opioids work by attaching to opioid receptors on nerve cells. These receptors are named after letters in the Greek alphabet: mu, delta, and kappa. Each of them performs a specific function. Although they play a large role in addiction and drug dependence, “opioid receptors are [also] widely involved in various physiological and pathophysiological activities, including the regulation of membrane ionic homeostasis, cell proliferation, emotional response, epileptic seizures, immune function, feeding, obesity, respiratory and cardiovascular control as well as some neurodegenerative disorders” (Feng et al.). Thus, opioid receptors can be useful except when induced by a high intake of opioids, which affect three main regions of the brain: the limbic structures, brainstem, and spinal cord. Involved in emotion, motivation, and memory, the limbic system is where opioids create a sense of pleasure and relaxation. The brainstem regulates automatic functions such as heart rate, breathing, and digestion. It is here where opioids slow breathing and reduce pain. Additionally, since the spinal cord can receive signals before they reach the brain, opioids can relieve severe pain quickly by acting upon the spinal cord (NIH 2).

Prescription opioids have the ability to strengthen people when taken in the right amount. However, their potential to become extremely addictive has resulted in many health professionals lessening the dose or not prescribing them altogether. Those who have already developed a dependence on opioids are at risk of addiction. When a person uses opioids for a long period of time, the nerve cells in their brain become conditioned to the drugs, and they will have an unpleasant feeling once they try to stop. This is called drug withdrawal and coupled with drug tolerance, it can lead to substance abuse. Symptoms of withdrawal include but are not limited to drug cravings, irritability, vomiting, tremors, insomnia, and feeling cold. The best way to reduce withdrawal symptoms and safely transition away from drugs is with professional medical care. Oftentimes, doctors will prescribe medications such as methadone and buprenorphine for short-term withdrawal symptoms and long-term opioid dependence (ASA).

There has been a large effort to decrease opioid overdose in the past few years, but the numbers are still relatively high. According to the article “Understanding the Epidemic,” “The number of drug overdose deaths decreased by 4% from 2017 to 2018, but the number of drug overdose deaths was still four times higher in 2018 than in 1999. Nearly 70% of the 67,367 [drug overdose] deaths in 2018 involved an opioid” (CDC). These numbers only pertain to the United States, but opioid addiction is a problem across the entire world and is especially relevant in less developed countries. In first world countries such as the U.S., many preemptive measures have been taken against drug abuse. For instance, in response to the increasing number of overdoses from prescription opioids,
medical professionals reduced the number of opioid prescriptions by 37.1% between 2014 and 2019. However, according to the Opioid Task Force 2020 Report, “Despite these efforts, illicitly manufactured fentanyl, fentanyl analogues and stimulants (e.g. methamphetamine, cocaine) are now killing more Americans than ever. The use of these illicit drugs has surged and their overdose rate increased by 10.1% and 10.8%, respectively” (Singer). These illicit drugs include highly addictive opioids like heroin, and the selling of them constitutes criminal activity. Addicts often snort, smoke, and inject illicit drugs into themselves. These methods induce a faster and more intense response than when taken as an oral pill, making the drugs even more dangerous. The injection of illicit drugs is especially harmful because of an increased risk for infectious diseases and other illnesses, as many addicts share needles. When a drug is injected into a vein, it arrives to the brain all at once in a matter of minutes, creating something called a “rush.” A rush is a feeling of euphoria that lasts for a few seconds until it gets leveled off, and the person just becomes high for about 15 to 20 minutes (American Addiction Centers). Therefore, even though there is more caution around prescribing opioids in the medical community, the use of illicit opioids have caused overdose deaths to surge.

Even though addiction is an issue that affects people across the world, there is less progress towards fighting drug abuse in third world nations. The use of illicit drugs and the misuse of prescribed drugs remains a relevant issue. In fact, the abuse of codeine cough syrup has become a rising challenge in less developed countries. Codeine is an opioid that can cause organ failure and trigger schizophrenia. It’s been misused in countries around the world, but in Nigeria, it has become an epidemic. Students have been combining the syrup in soft drinks and taking it to become high. An article by BBC explains, “The codeine is imported, but the syrup is made in Nigeria by more than 20 pharmaceutical companies...Codeine syrup addiction is a problem across Africa, with reports of addiction in Kenya, Ghana, Niger, and Chad” (1). The problem is spread throughout different classes, and teenagers are especially susceptible to codeine syrup abuse because there are so many adolescent users.

Overall, opioid misuse is an issue that extends across the entire world. Opioids act on the body’s natural reward system and keep people longing for more. Overdoses from prescription opioids have become less of an issue in the United States, but illicit drugs are killing millions in both first and third world countries. Scientists and medical professionals have created opioid receptor antagonists, which reverse the effects of opioids by blocking opioid receptors. Naloxone and naltrexone are the two most common opioid antagonists, and they are used to treat withdrawal symptoms (Theriot et al.). However, more methods of treatment for addicts need to be studied and tested, and more research is needed to be done to completely understand the genetic and environmental factors that play into opioid addiction.