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Boys and Girls Club of Monterey County

CST 462s Race Gender & Class Digital World - Spring 2020

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Introduction

The Boys and Girls Club of Monterey County (BGCMC) in Seaside is a place for children; children of any shape, size, and color in need of after school care. In a review of the 2019 annual report of the BGCMC we found that the original club, called the Boys Club of the Monterey Peninsula was established by William Roosevelt in 1968. It wasn't until 1985 that the name was changed to include girls. A wide age range of children are welcome at the Club starting at kindergarten and continuing all the way through high school. Those who have graduated high school but are not yet 18 can continue to be a part of the club until they are legally an adult, 18 is the cut off age. The Boys and Girls Club offers a wide range of activities whether it be completing their homework or just hanging out in the activity center. The club also offers kid-friendly events outside of the normal club hours such as basketball tournaments on the weekends. The club serves the community in many ways but arguably its most important role is providing a safe learning and social environment for children of all genders and ethnicities. The Club helps children and parents of the Seaside Community as a place for those who don't have anywhere to go to after school. The club focuses on safety, equality, and learning with structured activities throughout their time spent at the club. During our time at the Boys & Girls Club of Seaside, we interacted with all the children by helping with their homework, teaching them new games and enforcing the club rules. We also briefly worked with the Marketing Director, Meghan Row as well as the human resources division of the Boys and Girls Club to help with creating informative brochures to help promote The Club.

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Area of Study

In light of COVID-19 and the nationwide "shelter in place," we no longer have physical access to the club or its members. Based on our experience and observations at the club we are choosing to study any inequalities between the socioeconomic background and gender of children and their digital access and use of the virtual programs available at The Boys and Girls Club of Monterey County's website. We chose this topic because we found, prior to the shut down of the club their marketing director, Meghan Row, was constantly updating the club's website, sending out emails and making sure to include visual or text representations of all genders and races. Meghan would use technology to both produce and distribute information on the club website along with flyers/brochures. From these experiences we have posed the following questions:

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between the socio-economic background of children and their access to technology and resources in general?
2. Does gender play a role when it comes to accessing and using technology?

Literary Review

Based on our research, we have found a number of scholarly articles with references to gender and socioeconomic topics as they relate to digital learning. In the article "Internet Use by Secondary School Students: A Digital Divide in Sustainable Societies?". The authors discuss the differences among socioeconomic classes they defined as lower, middle, and higher class. "We have confirmed that the differences of use also come from equipment and access differences.

This way, higher class students, with more and better resources, are those who make a better use of the Internet, using computers more often than mobile phones and devoting more time to education than to leisure activities. On the contrary, lower class students use the Internet more often to have fun, and with less parental control" (Pagán, Martínez, 2018). This leads us to believe that students with higher socioeconomic status will have greater digital access and be more successful during this online learning time. Another article that backs up this idea is "Digital Divide: How Do Home Internet Access / Parental Support Affect Student Outcomes". The author reviews the digital divide among middle school students in China and around the world and how having internet access affects their grades and student outcomes. This research can be used in relation to the Boys and Girls Club of Monterey County because a number of members at the club may be struggling to access the club's newly posted virtual programs due to their socioeconomic background. "Studies show that, in the United States, Black, Hispanic, Native American and poor students are less likely to have access to computers and the Internet at home than their Caucasian and Asian counterparts." The article offered additional evidence that socioeconomic backgrounds take a toll on poor students' digital access and their academic success. "...Warschauer and colleagues [8] found that students in low-SES schools were heavily impacted by the sparse access to computers and the Internet at home." They went on to further say "… children who use the Internet more had higher scores on standardized tests of reading achievement and higher GPAs than children who used it less did." We can assume that children with greater digital access will have greater academic outcomes. (Lei, J., & Zhou, J. 2012)

With the unexpected length of the shelter in place, by the end of this pandemic, we as a community should have greater knowledge in online learning systems. It may be beneficial to

incorporate a blended learning system, such as the one discussed in the article, “The blended learning ecosystem of an academic institution in Greece”. A blended learning system incorporates standard physically attended classes with online programs. The researchers discovered what blended learning is like in the institutions of Greece who are going through an economic crisis. The researchers found that “Students perceive the existence of computer and communication technology as a natural part of their life and seem more comfortable with them than instructors, which hesitated to adjust their teaching style to better utilize blended learning features. For both instructors and students, gender did not affect their willingness to facilitate blended learning.” The students were able to adapt to the blended learning system equally, regardless of gender which indicates that gender may not play a role at all in digital access or use of the clubs virtual programs. (Nikolaidou, M. et al, 2010)

We were able to find some research on participant engagement in after school programs. In this article, “Engagement in after-school program activities: Quality of experience from the perspective of participants”, “[participants]...reported being more engaged in activities involving both adults and peers than activities with peers only”. Which leads us to believe that the club will struggle to get participant engagement with virtual “on-demand” programs that do not have an adult virtually present like their “live” programs. The club currently offers both on-demand independent virtual programs and live sessions with club staff. In our Findings and Discussion section we detail the Google Analytics results on the participation with club programs.

Research Participants

As said before, in light of COVID-19 and the nationwide “shelter in place” we no longer have physical access to the club or its members. As a team, we have decided to carry on with our

previously planned interviews with a handful of administrative staff members available digitally from the club. We interviewed the Director of Marketing and Communication, Meghan Row. Along with Meghan, we interviewed the CEO Ron Johnson, the Program Services of Seaside, Marlene Trotter-Murray, the Director Curriculum Development and Evaluation, Nikki Guichetand, and the Program Services of Salinas Jose Moran. We conducted all interviews through zoom and or email.

Strategies

In order to answer our two guiding questions we collected data from multiple sources. Using a google form submitted to the Boys and Girls Club of Monterey County (BGCMC) Facebook page we have collected data specific to age, gender, socioeconomic background, club use/access, device access, and wi-fi accessibility. Using the US Census,and Google Analytics we have collected the same data measurements specific to Monterey county. We also reviewed the 2019 Annual Report for BGCMC. We interviewed 5 staff members of BGCMC asking questions relevant to our guiding research questions and similar to the data measurements collected from other sources. We further researched and reviewed numerous peer reviewed articles on distance learning, digital access, blended learning, gender, and socio-economic effects on student success as they relate to digital learning. We synthesized the common themes among the articles reviewed. Using all these data resources we formed the following conclusions.

Findings, Discussion, and Conclusions

What is the relationship between the socio-economic background of children and their access to technology and resources in general? In other words, does a digital divide exist for

children from low socioeconomic backgrounds? To answer our first question we were led to conclude based on our literary reviews and data collected that those with lower socioeconomic status may be subject to fall behind in school or not get the full experience of the online activities that the club is currently offering due to their limited access to devices and wifi. However, when interviewees were asked about the club providing digital devices and assisting with access every staff member interviewed said the local public school systems have done an excellent job providing devices and hot spots to every student in need. They have not received even one request for device provisions. When comparing the report from the U.S. Census with our interviews we saw that prior to public schools handing out devices 87.6% of households in Monterey county had computers and 80.8% of the county had internet service. Those percentages leave roughly 20% of Monterey households without the necessary tools to access the club's programs under normal circumstances. We are led to believe a digital divide exists for lower socio-economic classes based on both peer reviewed articles and the US census results that both indicate that a low socioeconomic background negatively affects digital access. However, this is no longer accurate during this time of mass distance learning because public schools have closed the current digital divide by providing devices and hotspots to meet the distance learning requirements of COVID-19 for all students including those from a low socioeconomic background.

From our google form responses we have found that the majority of club members on the BGCMC Facebook are female, over the age of 18, and neither they nor their families qualify for free or reduced lunch. Of form participants, only one respondent stated that they do not have reliable wifi. We want to acknowledge that due to the current pandemic there is a skew in our

data because we were only able to post our form on a couple facebook pages rather than polling club members in person. This left us with results narrowed down to only those who are on the BGCMC and Parents of Monterey Facebook pages limiting our respondents to generally be adults. All our form participants answered “no” when asked if they were accessing the club’s digital programs. Despite all the google form participants saying they or their children did not access the club's digital programs we have data from Google Analytics which indicates the digital programs are being utilized. According to Google Analytics, the club’s “on-demand” programs are averaging 250 users per week and the “live virtual” programs are averaging 125 users per week. So yes, a child’s low socio-economic background would normally create a digital divide for them due to their low access to devices and wifi as multiple research articles stated. This lack of access would then affect their ability to access the clubs digital programs. Fortunately, out of the many negative consequences of COVID-19 we have a positive! All children regardless of their socio-economic background have equal digital access in Monterey county.

Our second question, *Does gender play a role when it comes to accessing and using technology*? When trying to answer if gender plays a role in which digital program a minor uses we had difficulty getting hard data. According to all interviewees BGCMC club membership and normal condition use by members is made of 52% males and 48% females. Going over Google Analytics for the current use we were able to find that 55% of users accessing the BGCMC “on demand” and “Live” virtual programs are male and 45% are female. While this is a small difference it does indicate that more males are accessing and using technology in general than females. Using Google Analytics we were able to pull data on which programs among all users

were most popular. Google Analytics has shown that the most popular program is Art. This result was shocking to us because generally females take more interest in art and according to Google Analytics there are 10% more males accessing the virtual programs, including the art programs, than females. Based on interviewee responses about who they were able to visually identify by video, we know that "live" virtual use by minors of the club matched closely with normal club membership percentages by gender. Meaning live program use is about 52% male and 48% female or roughly even among males and females. Meghan Row, Director of Marketing, also mentioned another inaccuracy in trying to count live participants in the virtual programs. She said that the majority of the time the gender data displayed is inaccurate because children are using their older siblings' or parents' devices, therefore only those with live video feeds could be identified by gender by our interviewees.

So in summary, since the club's inception in 1968 when it was exclusively for boys to its current membership status of 52% male vs 48% female, there has always been more male participation than female. Gender does appear to play a role in digital access of BGCMC programs. While a 4% swing in gender membership and normal club use is a small difference, through our research we have found that the forced use of digital platforms has resulted in increasing that gender gap from 4% to 10% in favor of male access. This is good feedback for the club as the staff plans for continued on demand and live courses. Based on interviewees attendance reports on male and female participation we recommend that they reach out to male members and personally invite them to the live courses to increase male participation. We also recommend that staff reach out to female members and advertise their on demand programs to increase female participation. Looking back at our literature reviews, we believe it is possible

that female members of the club are attracted to the live courses due to their social nature while male members are attracted to the art courses due to the physical activity involved.

To conclude, due to the current unusual circumstances of COVID-19, we have found that there is not a digital divide for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds but there would be under normal circumstances and there still exists a divide between genders for digital accessibility. This calls for public action. If we are to claim to be a society that prides itself on free equal access regardless of gender or socioeconomic background to public education for all then we have a social responsibility to make that a reality. We must work to provide for those that have a need to create equity for all students. The only reason why the digital divide is currently closed is because public schools were forced due to distance learning requirements to provide devices and wifi access. When public education returns to "normal" will they take back all the devices and hotspots? Unless the public demands government officials increase public school funding and support digital access for all students public schools will have no choice but to collect devices and hotspot to run their required programs forcing the digital divide to begin again.

Action Toward Systemic Change

In our action towards systemic change, as stated above, we recommend that the staff members of the BGCMC reach out to the female club members to give them more information on the digital activities that they provide to attract more females that would like to learn. With them reaching out we hope that the information given brings more females to join in and clear the 10% gender gap back to 4% or even less, and eventually we hope to close the gap. After this nationwide shelter in place is over, staff members and public schools should try to get a grant

passed to help those students of lower socio-economic backgrounds keep the laptops, hotspot devices, and other pieces of technology that were given to them to help during this pandemic. If they are able to keep the devices and hotspots, those families of lower socioeconomic status may be able to raise the statistics of their children's success levels. We found that since 1940 generally the male population earned more college degrees when compared to the female population. It also shows that females are now catching up. These facts show that the situation at hand is definitely improving but not improving as fast as we would like it to. Our plan towards systemic change to improve the gender divide in a faster way would be to lessen the gender gap earlier to students in public elementary schools so that by the time they are in college the gender gap will not be as wide. We believe that both the Boys and Girls Club and the community it serves would greatly benefit with a bigger push towards gender and socioeconomic equality.

Resources

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