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A Narrative Inquiry into the Influence of School Shooting Survival on College Transition and Experience

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**A Narrative Inquiry into the Influence of School Shooting Survival
on College Transition and Experience**

Jayne M. Piskorik

**Dissertation submitted to the College of Applied Human Sciences
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education**

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ABSTRACT

There is an extensive body of school-related shooting research exploring causes, how to recognize a threat, and what preparedness measures are effective (Lee et al., 2020; Muchert, 2007). However, there is insufficient research on how the broader context of school-related shootings in American society has influenced college-aged students. The purpose of this study was to tell the story of how students have been influenced by their experience surviving the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting during their transition to and performance in higher education. Narrative inquiry provided a deeper understanding through narrative retelling of the perceptions, decisions, and experiences of school shooting survivors. Schlossberg's transition theory provided a framework by which to analyze participant experiences. This study narrowed a gap in the existing literature by exploring and uncovering school shooting survivor experiences during their transition and time in college. Participants shared important information and perspective on their challenges making friends, processing trauma, and exploring their interests outside of advocacy work. Findings demonstrate the importance of substantial mental health support in college.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Significance.....	3
Purpose and Research Questions	4
Positionality	4
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Chapter Two: Literature Review	12
College Transition.....	12
Mental Health.....	13
Supportive Relationships	15
Trauma and Transition.....	17
Conclusion	20
College Experience	20
Influence of Experienced Trauma in College	21
Measuring Student Success.....	25
Student Circumstance and Identity.	26
College Student Activism	32
Conclusion	37
Influence of School Shootings	37
Perception of K-12 School Shootings.....	38
Perception and Reality: College Campus Shootings.....	41
The Role of Media Coverage	43
Fear of Crime	48
Fear of Victimization Among College Students	50
Mental Health Following a College Shooting.....	52
Student Performance Following a School Shooting	54
Conclusion	56
Chapter Conclusion.....	56
Chapter Three: Methods	58
Introduction.....	58
Design of the Study.....	58
Sample Selection.....	60

Data Collection	61
Data Analysis	62
Validity and Reliability	63
Researcher Positioning	64
Limitations	65
Ethical Considerations	65
Chapter Four: Findings/Participant Stories	67
Hannah’s Story	67
High School	67
College Transition	72
College	78
Veronica	84
High School	84
College Transition	88
College	96
Ross	100
High School	101
College Transition	102
College	104
Chapter Five: Discussion, Limitations, and Recommendations	110
Introduction	110
Research Question One – Transition	111
Situation Factors	111
Sense of Self	121
Support	125
Strategies for Coping	126
What Schlossberg’s Transition Theory Fails to Explain	128
Research Question Two – College Experience	131
Narrative Elements Explained by Previous Research	131
Co-Curricular Involvement	132
Mental Health in College	134
Advocacy Work	137
Narrative Elements That Cannot be Explained by Previous Research	140

The Influence of COVID-19 140

Summary of Findings..... 142

 Schlossberg’s Explanatory Power..... 142

 What Schlossberg’s Transition Theory Failed to Explain 146

Limitations of the Research 150

Implications for Research and Practice..... 151

Future Research Possibilities 154

Final Thoughts 156

References 159

APPENDIX A 175

 Participant Recruitment Letter 175

APPENDIX B 177

 Research Instrument – Interview One..... 177

APPENDIX C 179

 Research Instrument – Interview Two 179

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Chapter One: Introduction

Since the Columbine High School shooting, more than 311,000 students attending 331 K-12 schools have experienced a shooting on school grounds during school hours (Cox et al., 2022). Further, *The Washington Post* reported that at least 185 children, educators and other people have been killed in assaults, and an additional 369 have been injured (Cox et al., 2022). In response, active shooter drills have become familiar to students as they are practiced normally alongside natural disaster drills. The deadliest school shootings including Columbine High School, Sandy Hook Elementary School, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School have occurred during the lifetime of Generation Z (born 1995 through 2015). We know little about how these occurrences influence their lives after high school.

Mass shootings are a widespread phenomenon influencing the experience of Generation Z from childhood (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). These experiences have inspired student sentiments like, “At any time of any day, I know that anyone could commit any act of violence to me or others around me, and that I am never safe” (Seemiller & Grace, 2017, p. 180). Since the 1999 Columbine shooting, school shootings have shifted in the American mindset from isolated incidents to a national threat to our children and educational system (Jonson, 2017; King & Bracy, 2019). Fear of crime and victimization in the classroom have shifted focus away from learning as the primary concern and shattered the idea of safe school environments for American children (Jonson, 2017; Lee, et al., 2020).

On February 14, 2018, fourteen students and three staff were fatally wounded, and 17 others were injured in a school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSDHS) in Parkland Florida (Gualtieri et al., 2019). MSDHS became the site of the second deadliest K-12 school shooting in American history when former student, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz, entered

the 1200 building with a semiautomatic rifle and committed a shooting through classrooms that lasted less than six minutes (Alhanti et al., 2018; Onion et al., 2019). “The shooting resulted in 17 deaths, a surge of media coverage, re-ignition of the political debate over gun policies and school security measures, and a student-led movement for national gun control” (O’Neill et al., 2019, p. 116). This school shooting remains the second deadliest K-12 shooting in American history, exceeded in mortality only by the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting of 2012 (Mass Shooting Database, 2015). Lauren Hogg, born in 2003 and a survivor of the MSDHS shooting explained, “I’ve grown up since kindergarten with code-red [active shooter] drills. My generation has been trained to deal with things like this” (Hogg & Hogg, 2018, p. 9).

A small group of the surviving MSDHS students formed “March for Our Lives,” a coalition advocating for gun control to prevent future mass shootings following their traumatic experience (Alhanti et al., 2018). David Hogg, one of the group’s most vocal members explained, “We were all born after Columbine, we all grew up with Sandy Hook and terrorism and code-red active-shooter drills. We have all grown up conditioned to be afraid. And we’re all sick and tired of being afraid” (Hogg & Hogg, 2018, p. 19). While some chose to become gun control activists, like those in March for Our Lives, others have chosen different paths. The purpose of this study is to tell the story of how students have been influenced by their experience surviving the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting during their transition to and performance in their higher education.

There is an extensive body of school-related shootings research around causes, how to recognize a threat, and what preparedness measures are effective (Lee et al., 2020; Muchert, 2007). However, there is insufficient research on how the broader context of school-related shootings in American society has influenced college-aged students. Researchers have examined

a breadth of areas including the influence of media on Americans' perception of school shootings, the effectiveness of drills and preparedness measures, common identity profiles of a shooter, and how psychological trauma and mental illness might play a role in the shooter's motivation (Lee et al., 2020; Muchert, 2007). An underemphasized area of research is the influence of school-related shootings on individual students, specifically school shooting survivors, as frequent research efforts focus on the broader contextual and societal impact of school-related shootings (Muchert, 2007).

Significance

Classroom and campus climate dictate student learning in fundamental ways. Research demonstrates that students who feel safe at school have higher attendance rates, fewer misconduct issues, and perform better academically in the classroom than their peers who do not feel safe (King & Bracy, 2019). Creating a welcoming and safe school climate is necessary to provide a conducive learning environment while fear of school violence conflicts with these efforts (King & Bracy, 2019). How has surviving a high school shooting influenced students' view of safety or comfortability in new or existing communities? Transition to a new community can be unsettling, and this study seeks to understand the emotions and safety considerations of MSDHS shooting survivors when joining a new college community.

The purpose of this study was to explore how the 2018 MSDHS shooting has influenced student survivors in their transition to and experiences in higher education. Accounts of school-related shootings have made headlines for over two decades, changing the landscape of the American education system, leaving citizens with more questions than answers. Scholars have examined a breadth of topics concerning school shootings, including contributing factors of school shootings, how to identify troubled students/potential school shooters, impacts of active

shooter drills, the influence of preparedness measures, and media influence on society following a school shooting (i.e., Jonson, 2017; King & Bracy, 2019; Lee, et al., 2020; Muchert, 2007; Regehr et al., 2017), but few have studied the influence these elements have on the survivors of school shootings. This study is significant because it presents the narrative of how surviving a school shooting has influenced the student experience in a variety of ways, from institutional choice to on-campus involvement in co-curricular opportunities.

Purpose and Research Questions

While significant research on school-related shootings exists, few studies examine the influence of these events on survivors as they enter college. The purpose of this study was to tell the story of how students have been influenced by their experience surviving the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting. Specifically, this study explored their transition to and experiences in higher education considering the prevalence of school shootings over their lifetime and, perhaps more saliently, the experience of surviving a school shooting. This was achieved through focusing on two main areas: transition to postsecondary education and college experience. This study specifically sought to answer the following research questions.

1. How has surviving the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School Shooting influenced student survivors in their transition from high school to college?
2. How do MSDHS shooting survivors explain their college experiences?

Positionality

As a millennial in North America, I receive a majority of information through social media and traditional media sources. When traumatic events occur, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting, and the Las Vegas Concert Shooting, information is received through mass media and social media sharing. This influences

the lens by which I approach this study. Mass media and social media have become tools for many of the MSDHS shooting survivors to share their message on gun control and experience that day. As the researcher, I must be cognizant of how I analyze documents, specifically articles and interviews by traditional media sources, to manage empathy and eliminate bias from these elements.

Potentially the more significant life experience that affects my research is cohabitating with a law enforcement officer. Much of my inspiration for my topic came from the Pittsburgh Synagogue shooting that happened in 2019. My partner, who is a law enforcement detective, rushed into work after being released from his overnight shift to assist with the event response. Living with someone who regularly responds to, and studies dangerous/traumatic events influences my life and my lens. I chose this topic after being inspired by the local high school students' response and coordination of vigils following the shooting. I do not believe that having a close relationship with and respect for law enforcement will bias my analysis or interviews, but it is a consideration for this study.

While this study is not about gun legislation or politics, these are two elements that are bound to play a role in the data and analysis of this study. Many of the MSDHS shooting survivors have used their platform to advocate for stricter gun legislation (Alhanti et al., 2018). I am an advocate for stricter gun laws, but my views will not influence the analysis of this study. This study focuses on the experience of MSDHS shooting survivors as they enter higher education and not on gun legislation. Activism is a large outcome of this experience that needs to be presented in an unbiased light.

Theoretical Framework

This study used Schlossberg's transition theory as a framework to examine the research questions and gain further insight to the influence of school shootings on surviving college students. While this theory was developed to understand the experience of adult learners, it has frequently been used to examine the transitional experiences of traditionally aged college students. The theory has been applied to research on a variety of topics including nontraditional aged students returning to college (Schaefer, 2010), traditional students transitioning from community college to a four-year institution (Lazarowicz, 2015), the transition from nursing student to registered nurse (Wall et al., 2018), and military veterans transitioning to college (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Schlossberg's transition theory will provide a framework to understand the transition experience for MSDHS shooting survivors going to college.

Schlossberg's transition theory "provides insights into factors related to the transition, the individual, and the environment that are likely to determine the degree of impact a given transition will have at a particular time" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 213). Experiencing and surviving the MSDHS shooting had a different influence over each student and their transition to college, which Schlossberg's theory seeks to explain. Transition is defined as "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33). Evans et al. explained that perception is key in determining if an event or non-event qualifies as a transition in Schlossberg's theory; it may only be defined as a transition if the individual experiencing it perceives the experience as a transition. "Changes may occur without the individual's attaching much significance to them – such changes would therefore not be considered transitions" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 215). In this case, the transition to college and a

new environment likely resulted in changed relationships and routines like Schlossberg suggested.

To understand the meaning a transition has for each student, the type of transition, context of the event or non-event, and impact of the transition must be considered. Schlossberg described three types of transition, including anticipated events, unexpected events, and non-events. Anticipated events are expected transitions; unanticipated events are unexpected or not predicted transitions; and nonevents are transitions that are expected but do not occur (Evans et al., 2010). Evans et al. clarified that the context of a transition, as explained by Schlossberg, refers to the individual's relationship with the transition and the setting in which the transition takes place. This study will examine an anticipated event, transitioning to college, and examine the experience for participants as it relates to their experience surviving a school shooting. The transition likely spurred changes in relationships, support networks, and stress coping mechanisms that were used throughout high school.

Schlossberg described the transition process as having three components: approaching change, taking stock, and taking charge (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Approaching transitions component describes the experience leading up to the transition, which might include the type of transition (anticipated, not anticipated, non-event), the context, and impact of the change (Goodman et al., 2006). Interview questions that focus on the approaching change phase will concentrate on the months leading up to beginning college, how decisions were made, how relationships changed, and what stressors arose. The taking stock phase considers four factors, presented as "the four S's", that influence a person's ability to cope with a transition, which include situation, self, support, and strategies (Evans et al., 2010, p. 216). The taking stock phase will emphasize the experience of transitioning and how the four S's played a factor in participant

experiences. Lastly, Goodman et al., explained that the taking charge phase describes the end of a transition where the person is comfortable and ready to explore their next transition or phase. The taking charge phase will transition from research question one, focused on transition, to research question two, the experience in college once the transition phase has ended and they feel comfortable on campus. The four S's will provide a true framework to understand the taking stock phase and the experience and emotion of transition.

Schlossberg described the four S's in depth, providing a lens of understanding for participant experiences. The first category, situation, considers eight factors that may be important during an individual's transition (Evans et al., 2010). These include:

1. Trigger: What precipitated the transition?
2. Timing: Is the transition considered "on time" or "off time" in terms of one's social clock?
3. Control: What aspect of the transition does the individual perceive as being within his/her control?
4. Role change: Is a role change involved and, if so, is it viewed as a gain or a loss?
5. Duration: Is it seen as permanent, temporary, or uncertain?
6. Previous experience with a similar transition: How effectively did the person cope then, and what are implications for the current transition?
7. Concurrent stress: Are other sources of stress present?
8. Assessment: Who or what is seen as responsible for the transition, and how is the individual's behavior affected by this person? (Evans et al., 2010, pp. 216-217).

The seven situation factors explore the context of participant transition in depth. In this study timing, control, role change, and concurrent stress may play a role in participant transition.

Depending on how soon participants transitioned after the school shooting event these factors may be of differing significance. A participant that transitioned to college eight months after the school shooting may have more concurrent stress and timing issues than someone who transitioned to college two years later. Role change could be a major factor for students who were advocates for gun control and spent significant time in the media and promoting the March for Our Lives campaign. Participants may be faced with a choice in their transition if surviving the shooting is a significant part of their identity and role or if they want to change the role they played in high school. Identity is considered more deeply in Schlossberg's second S.

The second S considers the individual's sense of self. Schlossberg explained that self includes two categories: personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources. Personal and demographic characteristics affect how an individual views life, such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, stage of life, state of health, and ethnicity (Evans et al., 2010). Psychological resources aid in coping and include ego development, outlook, and commitment and values (Evans et al., 2010). Identity will be an important factor of student experience both in the experience of surviving the MSDHS shooting and transitioning to college. Sample selection intentionally recruited participants of different high school graduation classes, identities, and backgrounds. Psychological considerations provided understanding of coping mechanisms and outlook after surviving a traumatic event and how that might play a role in college transition. Support systems will be explicitly explored in interviews and are a significant part of Schlossberg's theory.

Support is the third S, which includes four types of support: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions/communities (Evans et al., 2010). Support networks likely developed after the MSDHS shooting event. Support from family, community, teachers,

and peers are likely deep and meaningful for shooting survivors. Support will be an intricate part of the transition discussion for participants.

Lastly, strategies account for the final S and explain three different ways one might cope with a transition. These categories include those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the problem, and those that aid in managing the stress in the aftermath (Evans et al., 2010). Schlossberg included four coping modes individuals might employ, including information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior (Evans et al., 2010). During interviews the participants will be asked about strategies employed to ease the transition to college. Some participants may have strategies or coping mechanisms that were developed in response to the school shooting that help or hinder the transition to college. Participants will be asked to reflect on any strategies used in the transition and how the strategies were learned.

While the last S is focused on coping strategies, the authors explained that a transition has no end point; rather, transition is a process over time that includes phases of assimilation and continuous evaluation as people move in, move through, and move out of each phase (Anderson et al., 2012). For example, a phase of transition, moving in, may begin with moving to a college campus. When moving into a new situation, like college, one must become familiar with new roles, relationships, and routines. Once experiencing orientation and their first week of class, the student may feel that they are more comfortable and knowledgeable about their new environment and begin their “moving through” phase. Specifically, Anderson et al. explained that orientation programming helps individuals know what is expected of them, which eases the transition. Moving out, Schlossberg explained, is when people end one series of transitions, find stability in their environment, and start to plan the next experience or transition (Anderson et al., 2012). An example of this is when students are at the end of their college career and are evaluating post-

college options. Participants will be asked to reflect on and explain their experiences transitioning to college and assimilating to their new environment, and Schlossberg's Transition Theory will provide a lens to examine the transition phase through the four S's - situation, self, support, and strategies.

This chapter introduced the purpose, research questions, significance, and theoretical framework of this study. Schlossberg's transition theory was explored and provided a framework for this research. Chapter Two will examine literature related to this study to provide foundational knowledge for this study and identify gaps or inconsistencies in current research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Though school shootings are relatively rare events in comparison with many other crimes, they are a considerable cause for concern due to their impact, not only on the school students, faculty, staff, and victims but also on the local community, and the fear they create in schools across the nation (Gerard et al., 2015). Participants of this study experienced the impact of a school shooting firsthand which inspired the purpose of this study. This study will explore how surviving the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School (MSDHS) shooting influenced student transition to college and experience in their new community. This literature review will explore scholarship in three major subsections – college transition, college student experience, and the influence of school shooting events.

College Transition

The transition to college is a formative time for students which can influence whether a student retains to the institution. Beginning with the transition to college, research explores how students create support networks and what elements support their retention. A range of elements influence student transition; lived experiences and trauma are significant factors that may influence student transition.

Major life transitions, such as moving from a family home to college campus, often create valuable opportunities for growth and change but also potentially cause feelings of self-doubt and loss (Paul & Brier, 2001). Common challenges faced by first-year students include managing increased academic demands, building a new social network, and navigating the increased autonomy of college life (Kroshus et al., 2021). Scholars have examined student transition to college from a variety of lenses, which consider diverse identities and experiences.

In this section we will review studies that determine common pitfalls and provide guidance for a healthy transition to college.

Mental Health

Studies have found that globally, one in three first-year college students will experience symptoms of at least one diagnosable mental health disorder, most frequently major depressive disorder or generalized anxiety disorder (Auerbach et al., 2018). Conley et al. (2020) found a sharp increase in psychological distress and decrease in psychological and social well-being among first-year college students with a plateau after the initial period of transition. Kroshus et al. (2021) used an online survey over three points in the academic year to study how resilient coping, self-compassion, social support, school connections, and transitional stressors might predict depression and anxiety in 5,509 first year undergraduate students at a large public university in the United States. The researchers found that on average, participants experienced moderate increases in depression and anxiety from the summer before college through the spring. The entire sample showed moderate increases in depression and anxiety over the transition to college and there was wide variation in student's depression and anxiety trajectories. While all students experienced increased mental distress, their responses to that stress varied widely, with some students having very positive transitions and others having very negative transitions. Positive transitions, in the Kroshus et al. study, were defined by GPA performance, thriving, resilience, and higher self-compassion while negative transitions were marked by low GPA performance, lack of thriving, low resilience, and low self-compassion scores. "Changes in depression and anxiety had ripple effects across the spectrum of student functioning. Higher levels of depression and anxiety were prospectively associated with lower thriving, lower GPAs, less connection to school, and less self-compassion" (Kroshus et al., 2021, p. 7). Self-

compassion was found to be the strongest and most consistent predictor of successful college transitions. Individuals who were more self-compassionate built stronger school connections and garnered more social support than peers with less self-compassion (Kroshus et al., 2021).

Student transition to college has been viewed as a time of loss or grief over the changes happening in student lives. Students lament friendship connections given up or strained in the process of transitioning to college and regard these disconnections as losses (Azmitia et al., 2013; Paul & Brier, 2001). Paul and Brier (2001) described this feeling of loss and moving away from an established network of friends as “friendsickness.” When students are highly preoccupied with or concerned about their precollege friend network, they have a poorer transition to college. They explained,

Late adolescents who are concerned about losing old friends, and thus are focused backward on the precollege life, are more likely to experience friendsickness in college. In contrast, late adolescents who are concerned about making new friends, and thus are focused forward on college life, are less likely to experience friendsickness in college. Of particular importance, backward-looking concerns may impede necessary progress on divestment from the “old” life, thereby also obstructing investment in the “new” life. (Paul & Brier, 2001, p. 84)

The perceived loss of high school friendship causes additional stress on students and impedes their ability to create ties with their new institution and peers (Azmitia et al., 2013; Paul & Brier, 2001). Institutional belongingness is important to a successful transition, along with support from networks at home and at the student’s new institution.

Supportive Relationships

Yazedjian et al. (2007) researched how students perceive the role of supportive relationships during their first year of college. Specifically, they explored how support from parents, peers, and the institution influenced their adjustment to college. Students described that support from parents, peers, and the institution positively influenced their adjustment to college (Yazedjian et al., 2007).

Parental support was found to be important to student transition to college. Participants explained that receiving letters and packages provided excitement when received on campus (Yazedjian et al., 2007). Students perceived these gestures as a demonstration of parental support throughout their adjustment to college. Conversely, students often perceived parents' phone calls as a source of stress, expecting bad news or to have an argument over the phone. First-generation college students elucidated that though their parents could provide emotional support, there was a lack of knowledge and guidance pertaining to the actual college experience. Yazedjian et al. found that first-generation students felt that peers provided more instrumental support than parents. Findings from this study suggest that parents should maintain a supportive relationship with their children through the transitional period. Parents can ease student transition to college by accompanying them to orientation, and providing emotional support through sending mail, texts, email, and phone calls (Yazedjian et al., 2007).

Peer support has been found to predict academic, social, and overall adjustment to college (Paul & Brier, 2001; Yazedjian et al., 2007). Yazedjian et al. found that students in transition have described peers as providing both social and academic support, often citing their friends as their favorite aspect of their institution. The researchers explained that students value having friends who share a similar academic mindset and felt that their peers both encouraged

and celebrated academic success. Yazedjian et al. found that connecting to peers was an important element of connection in their findings. Students reported feeling isolated when transitioning to campus because they did not have anyone to talk to or receive support from in the initial adjustment period. Students who did not have peers from high school with them reported a lack of social connections. The researchers explained, “While the presence of high school peers facilitated the adjustment process for some students, for others, their presence was reported as being a constraining factor, one that prevented them from meeting new people” (Yazedjian et al., 2007, p. 38). The researchers reported that students most frequently reported finding friends in residence halls, classes, and student organizations. Making friends through these avenues made the university environment less overwhelming for students and created a greater sense of attachment with the institution. While peers are an important source of support for the college adjustment, they can also become a distraction; students must find balance between academic and social aspects of their new relationships (Yazedjian et al., 2007).

Lastly, Yazedjian et al. (2007) explored institutional support as an important hallmark of student transition to college. To date, there are very few studies examining the relationship between college adjustment and institutional support. Martin et al. (1999) studied this relationship and found that overall college adjustment is predicted by the student’s perception of the institution and faculty support. Specifically, Martin et al. found that students expressed value in a helpful and caring faculty and a feeling of community on campus. Yazedjian et al., found that supportive relationships with staff, faculty, and advisors all played an important role in the level of institutional support students felt. When faculty and staff forge genuine connection and show interest in students, a greater sense of community and support is perceived (Martin et al., 1999; Yazedjian et al., 2007). Students discussed how several other institutional factors

promoted their attachment to the institution and thus facilitated their adjustment, including orientation programs, size of institution, resources, location of institution, and feeling of belongingness or community (Yazedjian et al., 2007).

College transition can be a difficult period for students as they navigate increased autonomy, academic rigor, and the challenge of building a new support network on campus. Transition can be facilitated through support from parents, mentoring relationships with faculty and staff, and support from peers. While a feeling of loss or grieving for high school friendships may be present, it is important that students redirect energy into building new social networks in their new environment.

Trauma and Transition

Supporting students in their transition to college is paramount for institutions of higher education. To successfully transition and retain students to the institution, practitioners must further understand the student experience and what influences a student's decision to stay or leave the school. Students who have experienced trauma in their lives are potentially at risk for a stressful or unsuccessful transition to college (Banyard & Cantor, 2004). The definition of traumatic events varies widely among studies. In a study of 3,014 incoming first-year students at two midsized public universities (State University of New York at Buffalo and University of North Carolina), Read et al. (2011) found that the most highly reported traumatic events were life-threatening illness (35%), the sudden death of a loved one (34%), accident/natural disaster/or fire (26%), and physical violence (24%). They found that women are more likely to report trauma than men and 66% of matriculating college students reported experiencing one of the above traumatic events (Read et al., 2011). This section will explore studies that examine the transition experience for trauma survivors.

Baynard and Cantor (2004) conducted a quantitative study of 360 first semester college students who experienced traumatic stress and were potentially at risk for a stressful college transition. In the study, participants completed questionnaires about their adjustment to college and their exposure to traumatic events. Researchers broadly defined trauma as “a range of events that overwhelm an individual’s coping capacities and involves threats of serious injury or death to self or someone close to the individual” (Banyard & Cantor, 2004, p. 207). Banyard and Cantor examined the role of social relationships, coping, and making meaning of trauma in the variance of resilience among participants in their adjustment to college. Results showed a relationship between a cumulative exposure to higher levels of trauma and a negative personal and emotional adjustment to college. Negative college adjustment is determined by less resilient students who perceive lower levels of social support or lower attachment to friends and parents. Researchers found that “internal locus of control, higher levels of social support, and meaning making about traumatic events were linked to more positive adjustment” (Banyard & Cantor, 2004, p. 215). Positive adjustment is marked by more resilient students with stronger social connections or attachment to family and friends. Baynard and Cantor explained that trauma survivors who believe they can control what happens and how they respond to events are more resilient than their counterparts who believe everything is controlled by external powers. A significant finding of the research includes the relationship between meaning making and trauma. Trauma survivors who believe they can learn from their experiences or make positive meaning out of their situation tend to be more resilient. Lastly, the researchers explained that participants who demonstrate greater levels of “attachment to both family and friends, and who perceive social support to be present and beneficial at greater levels, are also more resilient as they enter college” (Banyard & Cantor, 2004, p. 215).

Transitioning to college can be stressful and there is increasing evidence that many college students have difficulty coping with the stress of college and are exhibiting severe psychopathology (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2012). Common stressors for college students include loss of previous social support networks, increased academic pressures, pressure to create new peer relationships, and increases in personal responsibility including housing and money management (Vaez & LaFlamme, 2008; Voelker, 2003). Galatzer-Levy et al. (2012) completed an intensive four-year longitudinal study with 157 undergraduates to examine resilience during the adjustment to college and how that might be influenced by exposure to potentially traumatic events. In this study, the researchers tested how flexible coping may predict student ability to adapt in their transition to college. Flexible coping, as defined by Galatzer-Levy et al., is one's ability to focus attention on distressing material and the ability to refocus attention away from the same distressing material. The authors examined trajectories of distress using latent growth mixture modeling and found that 50.6% of students in this sample were exposed to a potentially traumatic event in their first year of college. These findings suggest that first-year college students may be particularly vulnerable and that exposure to potentially traumatic events among this population is common. Participants who exhibited the ability to use flexible coping strategies showed greater degrees of resilience when exposed to a potentially traumatic event or when simply managing common stressors associated with college. For the most distressed students, "increases in social network size predict high levels of functional instability throughout college while increases in social network embeddedness appears to have a stabilizing effect on these students" (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2012, p. 562). Scholars have found that the number of people in one's social network does not predict adaptation; the quality of those relationships does predict adaptation (Morosanu et al., 2010).

Researchers have found that students in transition to higher education who have experienced potentially traumatic events show more resilience when supported by a social network (Banyard & Cantor, 2004; Galatzer-Levy et al., 2012; Morosanu et al., 2010). Perceived social support is an important element for resilience in trauma surviving students. Higher education institutions would benefit from providing networking events to support the students' search for meaningful relationships. The ability to make meaning of their experiences and cope with the negative emotions is central to a successful transition. Previous research suggests that finding meaning and feeling in control of one's future is important for students to move on from trauma, forge a path forward, and achieve success in higher education.

Conclusion

This section reviewed research on common hallmarks of the transition from high school to college and how trauma influences one's transition to college. There are no previous studies that were found exploring the trauma of surviving a school shooting and how that experience influences their transition and experience in college. The current study seeks to fill that gap in the literature by exploring MSDHS student transition to, and experience in college.

College Experience

Beginning with the transition to college, research explores how students create support networks and what elements support their retention. A significant factor that may influence student success is lived experiences and trauma. This section explores how trauma influences a student's identity development, college experience, student success, and how being involved in advocacy movements impacts the student experience.

Influence of Experienced Trauma in College

Trauma response in college students is a well-studied area of literature. Researchers have found that trauma in college students is more prevalent than might be expected. Various studies report an estimated 59% to 75% of undergraduate students reporting exposure in their lifetime to one or more traumatic events (Im et al., 2020). Considering the high prevalence of trauma in college student lives, individuals working with college students have a responsibility to be informed of the influence over how trauma survivors make sense of their experiences (Zeligman et al., 2019). In this section we will explore literature pertaining to the influence of lifetime trauma on college students.

In a study of trauma event prevalence among 1,528 undergraduate students at four universities across the United States, 85% of the sample identified experiencing at least one traumatic event during their lifetime (Frazier et al., 2009). Traumatic events are defined as when an individual has “experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others” (American Psychiatric Association, 2021, p. 467). Frazier et al., reported the most common traumatic events, in their study, as unexpected death, accident, other’s life threatened, family violence, and sexual assault. Participants also ranked unexpected death as the worst of the listed traumatic events with 63% of participants nominating it as the worst traumatic event they had experienced (Frazier et al., 2009).

Researchers have shown that trauma-exposed undergraduate students frequently report higher rates of functional impairment, including decreased engagement in school and work, difficulties with activities of daily living, and disengagement of personal relationships or other social pursuits (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2013; Im et al., 2020). Anders et al. (2012)

explained, “individuals who reported more lifetime events also reported poorer outcomes in a range of areas, including greater PTSD symptom severity, more general distress, lower life satisfaction, poorer general health, and lower GPAs” (p. 456). Additionally, studies show higher levels of anxiety, stress, and depression symptoms in traumatic experiences involving family violence, unwanted sexual attention, or sexual assault (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2009; Frazier et al., 2013). College students who have survived trauma may experience anger, withdrawal, or fear, as well as substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and self-harm (Frazier et al., 2009).

Trauma is frequently discussed through a litany of negative outcomes for the survivor. Despite evidence of potential negative outcomes resulting from trauma, scholars document positive outcomes from survivors’ goal of finding meaning in their trauma to cope and move forward (Zeligman et al., 2019). Traumatic events can result in eroding one’s worldview, which leaves survivors searching to make meaning from their pain. When the survivor can find meaning following a trauma experience, that may predict posttraumatic growth, which is often associated with better emotional outcomes following trauma (Grad & Zeligman, 2017). “Finding meaning from trauma may lead to more effective coping, which in turn is linked to less isolation from others, an issue particularly relevant to individuals beginning their college experiences” (Zeligman et al., 2019, p. 320). When compared to peers who had not experienced trauma, survivors of trauma reported more searching for meaning (Zeligman et al., 2019).

Zeligman et al. (2019) found that experiences of trauma and loneliness are both prevalent on college campuses and that history of trauma may contribute to greater feelings of loneliness. Specifically, college students who reported having experienced trauma expressed significantly greater levels of loneliness than college students who had not experienced trauma. Zeligman et

al. found that although the presence of meaning was a strong predictor in combatting feelings of loneliness within their sample, meaning presence alone is not enough to combat feelings of loneliness in people still searching for meaning following their trauma. This finding provides insight into the magnitude of loneliness felt by trauma survivors as they continue to search for meaning in their pain (Zeligman et al., 2019).

Loss of Loved Ones. Studies suggest that loss of a loved one is a commonly shared experience for college aged students. Research shows that between 22% and 30% of college undergraduates “are in the first 12 months of grieving the death of a family member or friend” (Balk, 2008, p. 5). Though dated, Balk (1997) provided information-rich findings concerning college student bereavement. The five-semester longitudinal study examined 994 college students in bereavement over deaths of family and friends (Balk, 1997). Balk et al. (2010) found that the rate of student bereavement in a random sample ($n=118$) averaged 30% over the entire study.

Studies of student bereavement are important because although not directly related to higher education, it may impact the college experience and academic performance. Researchers and mental health professionals have indicated bereavement presents “a defining issue in the lives of no less than 40% of the students on the campus” (Balk, 2008, p. 6). The loss of a loved one often “triggers an intense, challenging, and complex period of transition for those affected by the loss, but that the grief tends to resolve itself within six months or a year” (Balk, 2008, p. 8). College students experience unique long-term and short-term effects in their personal well-being and academic performance (Balk, 2008; Cox et al., 2015), due to financial and psychological complications resulting from the loss. During the semester of bereavement college students often experience additional strain on academic performance, putting them at risk of dropping out or

being expelled from school (Servaty-Seib & Hamilton, 2006). While bereaving students look for support, it may cause strain on relationships with peers.

Tedrick Parikh and Servaty-Seib (2013) studied 23 student opinions about supportive listening to a grieving friend. Participant responses suggested that students identified both benefits and risks when they considered supporting a friend in the grieving process. Tedrick Parikh and Servaty-Seib found that non-grieving peers often lack the knowledge of how to comfort a friend in bereavement. Participants also considered time, a quiet place, and previous experience with grief as requirements of supporting their grieving peers (Tedrick Parikh & Servaty-Seib, 2013). While support from friends has been cited as important for student response to traumatic events (loss of loved ones) and transition, many students suggest the support of a trained professional for coping through difficult times.

Cox et al. (2016) studied how stressful non-college life-events could have detrimental effects on students' likelihood of graduation. While this study covered a wide scope of non-college life-events, among them was loss of a loved one and student grieving. The longitudinal survey explored students' ($n=3,419$) frequency of grieving and use of psychological services by grieving and non-grieving students. Roughly one third of participants reported experiencing at least [one?] friend or family death. Participants reported loss in a variety of ways including, the most frequent, loss of an extended family member (1 in 4 participants), while less had lost a friend (1 in 10 participants), and least frequently students lost an immediate family member (1 in 20 participants). Over their four years, 60% of seniors in the study had lost a friend or family member since beginning college and 22.8% experienced multiple losses. Cox et al. examined use of counseling services during participants' sophomore year. Of students who reported losing a friend or family member in the previous year, 17.7% reported visiting a counselor at least once

while 14.4% of their counterparts who did not experience a loss also reported visiting a counselor. Overwhelmingly, 84.6% of grieving students never visited a counselor after losing a loved one (Cox et al., 2016).

These studies show that loss of a loved one during college is frequent and affects a considerable number of students. While studies range from 30% (Balk et al., 2010) to 60% (Cox et al., 2016) of college students experiencing loss in their four years, higher education institutions must be prepared to support students in their time of bereavement. Though counseling services are underused by this population, it is important that universities continue to provide this resource for grieving students. Loss of a loved one is a major life event that requires time of reflection and change. Transitioning to a new environment is another major life event that may bring new emotions and challenges to light.

Measuring Student Success

Student success is a well-researched area of literature seeking to define the route to achievement for today's students. Success has been defined a variety of ways, considering whole student development, cognitive and academic factors, and involvement or belongingness on campus (Aydin, 2017). Kim et al. (2010) defined college student success as "acceptable grade averages, retention toward a degree, and attainment of productive life skills" (p. 112). Kuh (2006) defined student success in broader terms, suggesting that student success is formed by pre-college experiences (high school academic performance and readiness for college); student engagement (involvement across campus in student organizations and campus life, study skills); and post-college outcomes (career attainment and grade point average). This section will explore literature examining a variety of factors that contribute to or distract from student success.

High School Success and Achievement. Student success is examined through a variety of lenses considering experience, identity, family support, and friendship, to name a few. Kim et al. (2010) suggested that factors affecting student success can be characterized by three types of variables. The first variable, identified by Kim et al., for student success is high school success and academic achievement. “The quality of high school academic preparation strongly predicts chances for postsecondary success, measured by enrollment, persistence, grades, and educational attainment” (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 29). Kim et al. (2010) explained, “the achievement/ability factor may serve as a selective screening variable during the admissions process, but it holds less importance for selecting strategies for increasing student success while in college” (p. 113). Adelman (2006) found that completing upper-level mathematics courses in high school (e.g., algebra II, precalculus, calculus, and trigonometry) is the best high school predictor of successful academic performance in college. Warburton et al. (2001) found that 87% of students who complete four years of English, math, and science during high school graduate from college while the persistence rate falls to 62% for their peers who did not complete the same coursework.

Student Circumstance and Identity.

Kim et al. (2010) consider student circumstance as the second variable influencing student success. Situational and identity factors are explained by this variable. This variable encompasses gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, being a first-generation student, and other salient demographics that have been shown to correlate with student persistence and success (Kim et al., 2010). “The social identity development of the students, achieved through multiple interactions with diverse others, contributed to their strengths in building relationships” (Longerbeam, 2016, p. 42). Balancing challenge and support are important for students of color, low-income students, first-generation students, and other identities outside of the “traditional

college student” identity for whom college environments were not designed. “Certainly, laissez-faire approaches to first-generation student learning may be a recipe for their failure and thus ours” (Longerbeam, 2016, p. 45). Academic preparation, high educational aspirations, and family support are more likely as a student’s family achieves higher socioeconomic status (Kuh et al., 2006). “Socioeconomic status influences prior academic preparation, pursuing steps to postsecondary enrollment and admission, enrollment, and degree completion” (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 29). Kuh et al. found that family income predicts whether a student will aspire to earn a bachelor’s degree, complete college applications, enroll in college, and how prepared they are for the academic challenge. Illustrating this point, Choy (2001) found that 82% of low-income high school graduates are likely to enroll in a four-year institution compared to their high-income peers who were more likely to enroll (92%). Similarly, first-generation students may not have the same guidance as their second-generation peers when entering college.

“Family education background is related to students’ higher postsecondary aspirations and greater likelihood of enrollment, persistence, and attainment” (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 29). Roughly one in three college students identify as first generation (National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), 2005). Kuh et al. defined first-generation students as students whose parent(s) did not pursue a four-year college degree. First-generation students are more likely to be women, racially diverse (42% Latino), and low income (Warburton et al. 2001). In high school, first-generation students are less likely to take advanced placement classes or advanced math (High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), 2005). The High School Survey of Student Engagement also found that first generation students are less knowledgeable about how to apply for college and financial aid. Roughly half, 55% of first-generation students, report having no discussions about college applications and entrance exams with parents (Horn &

Nunez, 2000). Choy (2001) revealed that 40% of first-generation students score in the lowest quartile of ACT or SAT. First-Generation students are also more frequently enrolled at public universities or attend college part time to balance other responsibilities like a job (Choy, 2001). A rigorous high school curriculum can narrow the college persistence gap for first-generation students, especially if they graduate high school in the top quartile (Warburton et al., 2001). First-generation students are twice as likely to take remedial courses than their peers with parents who have had college experience (21% vs. 10%, respectively) (Warburton et al., 2001). Lastly, first-generation students tend to be less engaged than their peers, which is attributed to having less knowledge about how to get involved on campus and why involvement is important (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

In their study of first-generation students, Padgett and colleagues (2012) found that in the first-year transition to college, first-generation students experienced less cognitive and psychosocial development than their second-generation peers. Additionally, Padgett et al. found that first-generation students interacted with faculty less than their second-generation peers:

First-generation students are underprepared to interact with faculty upon entering college. First-generation students, who theoretically are more likely to maintain lower levels of social capital, may not have been predisposed or encouraged to seek help and consultation from faculty members in high school; thus, these valued experiences from high school are not translated into college for them. (p. 261)

First-generation students, in the Padgett et al.'s study, were found to interact less with their peers than second-generation students did. Interacting with peers was found to have a positive effect on first-generation student success, suggesting that colleges should create intentional

opportunities for students to interact inside and outside of the classroom to encourage student success (Padgett et al., 2012).

Student Persistence. The idea of challenge and support on a college campus is widely referenced in higher education. Longerbeam (2016) explored how challenge and support on a college campus influence student success. Longerbeam used a mixed-methods design and had 709 participants at a Southwestern University in the United States, discussing how academic rigor or effort needed to succeed (challenge) and social encouragement from faculty, staff, and peers (support) influence learning and graduation rates (success). The researcher identified four major themes, which include embracing struggle, making personal connections, reaching out, and deepening involvement. “Students who reported academic challenge and a supportive campus environment were significantly more likely to report gains in general education (a measure of learning)” (Longerbeam, 2016, p. 38).

College students face a host of challenges during their time at college. Longerbeam (2016) cited financial challenges, social identity development challenges, academic challenges, and challenges with peers questioning integrity. Embracing the struggle and continuing in their education is a hallmark of student success in Longerbeam’s study. In a different study, Aydin (2017) examined the role of personal variables further and their prediction of academic success for college students. They found that pressure/stress and classroom communication appeared as significant predictors of success (Aydin, 2017).

Kim et al. (2010) consider personal realm of control or personal influence as the last variable of student success in their study. This considers free will and personal ability to influence, enhance, and shape one’s own life. Kim and colleagues (2010) defined personal variables which included “attitudes (e.g., motivation, work ethic), self-perceptions (e.g.,

confidence, self-efficacy), behaviors (e.g., work organization, study habits), problem-solving (e.g., critical thinking, decision making), and values (e.g., personal preferences, beliefs)” (p. 114). In a qualitative study at Bowling Green State University, researchers found evidence of perseverance having positive outcomes on a variety of student success measures. Perseverance was positively associated with academic adjustment, college sense of belonging, college satisfaction, college GPA, and persistence in college (Bowman et al., 2015). Additionally, research findings demonstrate that a key factor in persistence is the effort students put forth and time spent studying (Bailey et al., 2005).

Support Systems. Support is a commonly discussed and studied area of student success. Frequently, higher education professionals call on support from family, friends, and faculty/staff to support students throughout their academic pursuits. Kranstuber et al. (2012) examined how parental messages might influence student success. They found that college students receive and remember messages from their parents on a variety of topics. Participants most recalled messages such as “Work Hard and/or Play Hard, College is Un/Necessary, My Two Cents, Support and Encouragement, and General Advice” (Kranstuber et al., 2012, p. 58). The specific message themes were unrelated to student success; rather, the satisfaction with receiving a message from their parents emerged as a significant predictor of student success. “Thus, the relational context surrounding the message was a more robust predictor of college student success than the content of the message itself” (Kranstuber et al., 2012, p. 59). The researchers found that if students feel positively about the relationships and messages from home, they may be more likely to view their college experience in a similarly positive way (Kranstuber et al., 2012).

Parental influence is important, but the influence of peers or friends is also often questioned for the college experience. Swenson Goguen et al. (2010) found that trust and loyalty between college friends predicted higher first-semester grade point averages and persistence. Bronkema and Bowman (2019) found that “students with at least one campus friend had higher mean levels of emotional connection with their friends ($p < .01$) and had higher college GPAs ($p < .001$) than students who reported zero campus friends” (p. 276). Students who reported having one or more friends spent 90 minutes or more per-week partying than their peers without campus friends. “This finding is important because time spent partying had a negative direct relationship with college GPA, since it might have distracted students from other academic priorities” (Bronkema & Bowman, 2019, p. 276). Further, the results of this study revealed that having close campus friends is beneficial for college student success. Participants who reported having one or more close campus friend also had greater emotional connection, college GPA, and 6-year graduation rates than their peers who did not have any close campus friends (Bronkema & Bowman, 2019).

Longerbeam (2016) identified making personal connections as another predictor of success. The study found that students were adept at making connections and “they knew to whom to go, and when” (Longerbeam, 2016, p. 41). This includes peers, faculty, and staff as a network of support and personal connections. They went one step further to identify knowing when to reach out as another hallmark of student success. Students found faculty and staff advisors who could be helpful and sought out help in times of need (Longerbeam, 2016).

Aydin (2017) explained how faculty can create a classroom environment that encourages student success. “According to the results, classroom communication, including asking questions in a relaxed classroom environment, offering new ideas, and sustaining good relations with peers

and faculty members are positively correlated with academic achievement among the personal variables” (Aydin, 2017, p. 102). These findings suggest that increasing student communication (talking and learning among themselves) in the classroom environment should be given priority by faculty. “In addition, instructors and university counselors should pay attention to the positive relationship between stress and academic success, as a balanced level of stress should not always be feared during studies” (Aydin, 2017, p. 103).

Student Success is a popular area of research for higher education professionals. Institutions of higher education seek to support students to attain their goals, graduate, and attain a career. Success has been defined a variety of ways considering whole student development, cognitive and academic factors, and involvement or belongingness on campus (Aydin, 2017). The idea of challenge and support has been further explored to understand how students succeed through multiple challenges and what support is necessary to foster growth (Longerbeam, 2016). This section has highlighted how high school achievement, identity and circumstance factors, persistence, and support systems may support student success in college. There are gaps in the literature concerning school shooting survivors and their success in college. The current study will examine how surviving a school shooting influences college transition and success. While there is existing literature on trauma and student transition, success is not explored. This study will provide a lens into student experience and success in college after surviving a school shooting.

College Student Activism

Activism has been a hallmark of higher education throughout history. While many recall the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s as the beginning of student activism, student protest has been part of the narrative since the colonial era (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019).

Student activism in the 1960s has garnered more attention from scholars and historians than any other era in the 20th century resulting in romanticized recollection of the events for today's generations (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). Today, activism is abundant with the Black Lives Matter movement, and specifically for this study, the fight for gun control. Following the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, surviving students began to form working groups to spread their beliefs about gun law reform, ultimately resulting in the formation and founding of March for Our Lives (Alhanti et al., 2018). The coalition advocates for gun control to prevent future mass shootings following their traumatic experience. This section will review findings of studies on student activists, how they use their resources, and the toll activism can take on students.

The March for Our Lives movement garnered nation-wide support quickly and held media attention. Media outlets across the nation ran more than 7,900 stories online about the school shooting in the two weeks after the shooting (Siegel, 2019). Siegel confirmed that coverage of the MSDHS shooting outlasted coverage of other mass shootings with a focus on the message of surviving students calling for gun regulations. This role of activist stayed with many students as they left their family home to begin college after the shooting. When the media attention ceased, students continued to spread their message through social media platforms.

Generation Z are savvy technology users with knowledge of social media and how to spread their message. Student activists often are inspired, connected, organized, and sustained through the power of social networking sites (Gismondi & Osteen, 2017; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). Digitally aided activism movements are characterized by three shared traits which have helped to define the growth of student activism (Gismondi & Osteen, 2017). Using technology has been coined as "higher accessibility activism" (Albright & Hurd, 2021) which

includes low or no cost activities like posting on social media, boycotting, or signing a petition. For many college students, joining movements that are more accessible acts as a gateway to activism and provides support to virtual or local movements.

The first characteristic of highly accessible activism, identified by Gismondi and Osteen (2017), is to create a leaderless movement. This is not to say that there are not figureheads of each movement helping to amplify and define the goals of the larger group. These movements tend to be nonhierarchical with emphasis on shared ideas and passions. A second common characteristic of recent student activism is savvy use of social media to organize participants. In this context, organizing includes distributing logistical tasks while managing the flow of relevant information to other activists (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). Lastly, Gismondi and Osteen identified the use of social media to achieve a shared language and develop goals with others who care about their cause. In another study, Albright and Hurd (2021) described resource mobilization, which includes contacting the media, contributing original content to an online news source or social media, donating, and organizing an event. This method allows for wide-scale participation among a group of activists (Gismondi & Osteen, 2017). The use of social media has given advantage to activists looking to share their message. Gismondi and Osteen posit that success is often achieved through the development of immersive, relatable, and easily shared narratives. Recent movements (Black Lives Matter, March for Our Lives, etc.) have begun around a core issue but each was flexible enough to allow organic change as new developments arose and more people joined the movement. “These social media-driven, nonhierarchical student activist movements face the challenge of negotiating change with long-standing, traditional power structures” (Gismondi & Osteen, 2017, p. 69). The goal of shifting a

national narrative is difficult but widespread digital attention presents opportunity for instituting systemic change (Gismondi & Osteen, 2017).

While sharing information and garnering support through social media can be rapid, student activism has stood the test of time. Currently, in the United States many issues that were present on campuses in 1968 are still relevant (Wheatle & Commodore 2019). Students with minoritized identities report frequently struggling to see themselves represented in the curriculum and traditions of higher education institutions (Linder et al., 2019). “This lack of congruence leads some students to engage in activism and resistance to challenge institutions to change their practices to be more equitable, recognizing multiple ways of knowing, being, and learning” (Linder et al., 2019, p. 47). Linder and colleagues spoke with student activists from minority identities about their experiences in college as students and activists. They found activism can take a toll on students as they continually fight for their vantage point. Some students feel a responsibility to engage in activism, which results in them “forgoing the luxury of merely being a student and being able to invest most of their energy in academic, creative, and co-curricular activities that earn them cultural capital in college and beyond” (Linder et al., 2019, p. 47). In education, we see activism as a positive course of civil action. Linder et al. found that students frequently experience learning and growth through civil discourse and participating in advocacy work. Participants shared that student engagement in activism did not always translate to potential employers’ or graduate school admissions committees as measurable growth. Linder et al. (2019) found that students who were called to action and devoted their time to advocacy work were left without common co-curricular and academic experiences that their peers benefited from.

Linder et al. (2019) uncovered common consequences of engaging in activism as a college student. The first consequence described by participants is the feeling of isolation from peers and family. One student, in their study, described feeling isolated from his peers because they did not understand or recognize his efforts with activism as legitimate. Other participants explained that their families did not understand why they got involved in a particular movement or why they cared about a topic which created a feeling of distance from family members. The second common consequence of college student activism, identified by Linder and colleagues, is decreased academic performance and learning. Participants described difficulty prioritizing schoolwork and studying over activism and making their campus a safer place. One student explained, “For students involved in activism, it’s hard to balance out their studies and activism and their daily lives and their social circles with the kind of work that they do, which can get a little overwhelming,” (Linder et al., 2019, p. 54). The third consequence of activism, identified in this study, is influence over emotional and physical wellbeing. Students reported feelings of burn out, having a limited amount of energy, emotional exhaustion, and mental exhaustion (Linder et al., 2019).

While activism has been a hallmark of higher education from the colonial era, it has evolved with each generation and technological development. Students who engage in activism must be supported through their college community. Students will continue to negotiate change with traditional power structures; only now, the negotiation happens on an international level through the power of social media in the digital age (Gismondi & Osteen, 2017). Though activism is not a primary goal of this study, it is possible that the role of activism and founding the March for Our Lives campaign will play a role in the transition and experiences of MSDHS shooting survivors.

Conclusion

This section reviewed research on how trauma influences a student's identity development, college experience, student success, and how being involved in advocacy movements impacts the student experience. There are no previous studies exploring the trauma of surviving a school shooting and how that experience influences their transition and experience in college. The current study seeks to fill that gap in the literature by exploring MSDHS student transition to college, experience in college, and graduation trajectory.

Influence of School Shootings

When K-12 school shootings occur, they tend to engulf all news media for days, with coverage of the traumatic details. Though they seem to be an epidemic across the nation, in reality the risk of victimization in a school shooting is fairly low. Put into numbers, in the five years preceding the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting, over 50 million students were enrolled in school and 13 were shot and killed, illustrating the low risk (O'Neill et al., 2019). Though statistically low risk, following a school shooting event, families and students are hyper aware of the possibility of a school shooting happening around them. O'Neill et al. (2019) explained,

Responses to these rare shootings in schools and broader society ensure students are made aware of the threat of these violent events, and there is substantial evidence that indirect exposure to violent events can influence fear and broader perceptions of the environment. (p. 116)

O'Neill et al. (2019) illustrated the influence of school shootings over society and how the very occurrence of a school shooting event shifts student and societal perspective, resulting in greater fear of violence.

Colleges and universities are not exempt from gun violence and school shootings on their campuses. The deadliest of college shootings happened in 2007 at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) in Blacksburg, Virginia. A 23-year-old student went on a rampage resulting in 32 killed (27 students and 5 faculty) and wounded 17 others (Lenckus, 2007; Onion et al., 2011). Six other students were injured as they jumped out of windows to escape the gunfire. Two students in a dorm room were killed before the main classroom killings. (Onion et al., 2011). The tragedy at Virginia Tech occurred only 10 months before a shooting at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois. In this case, a heavily armed 27-year-old former student entered a campus auditorium where he began firing, ultimately killing five and injuring 18 before he committed suicide. School safety consultants report that universities and colleges nationwide took time to review security and emergency response plans following the deadly attack (Lenckus, 2007). Researchers have examined the influence of these experiences on students and staff on campus during the event. This section will review research conducted on the perception of K-12 shootings, the perception of college shootings, the role of media coverage, how school shootings influence fear of crime, fear of victimization among college students, mental health considerations after a campus shooting, and the effect of school shootings on student performance.

Perception of K-12 School Shootings

Perceptions of school shootings are complex and wide ranging. Generation Z students have reported the feeling that, “at any time of any day, I know that anyone could commit any act of violence to me or others around me, and that I am never safe” (Seemiller & Grace, 2017, p. 180). Earlier generations (older Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X, etc.) - adults and

parents of Generation Z - have also reported stress related to the perceived frequency of mass shootings in North America (American Psychological Association, 2019).

In 2019, mass shootings were reportedly the most significant source of stress for American adults, age 18 or older (American Psychological Association, 2019). In 2018, the American Psychological Association (APA) found that 62% of adults stated that mass shootings were a significant source of stress; this figure increased to 71% in 2019. The APA attributes this stress related to mass shootings to political candidates debating how to address key issues such as health care and mass shootings. Through their survey, detailed reasons for stress are not provided but context for the facilitation of this survey is important. The Harris Poll conducted an online survey on behalf of APA in 2019 which included 3,617 adults ages 18 and older living in the United States (American Psychological Association, 2019). Central Broadcasting System (CBS) reported that there were more mass shootings in 2019 than days of the year (Silverstein, 2020). These events included a school shooting at Saugus High School in California, a shooting at a Walmart in Texas, a municipal building in Virginia, and a community festival on a playground in New York (Silverstein, 2020). These are just a few examples of shootings that caught headlines and gripped the American public, causing stress and fear.

This stress is often attributed to the growing scope of media coverage, leading to moral panic (Jonson, 2017). Moral panic related to mass shootings has become a social context influencing Americans' experiences at concerts, religious events, movie theaters, malls, gyms, schools, and most public gatherings. Moral panic is described as a condition, event, person, or group of people that are defined as a threat due to perceived dissonance or misalignment with societal values or interests (Cohen, 2004). Widespread media coverage of mass shootings and

moral panic have created environmental distrust and a belief that nowhere is safe – not even schools (Jonson, 2017; Kaminski et al., 2010).

In 2018, YouGov completed a qualitative nationwide survey of American adults (18 and over) analyzing public opinion about criminal justice issues (Lee et al., 2020). Study respondents believed each of the following factors play either a large or a very large role in causing school shootings: “mental illness (64.6%), poor/absent parenting (62.1%), easy access to weapons (61.8%), bullying (61.3%), and lack of easily accessible mental health treatment (57.2%).” Alternatively, the “least popular causes are removal of religion in schools (34.2%), lack of armed staff and/or security officers in school (38.2%), violent video games/movies/TV/music (39.8%), the NRA (40.1%), and lack of security features in schools (e.g., metal detectors, security cameras) (40.8%)” (Lee et al., 2020, p. 18).

Lee et al. found that, “Americans understand that school shootings are complex and thus embrace a multifactor explanation” (2020, p. 21). Americans attribute shootings to two core components: opportunity and propensity. In this context, opportunity refers to access to firearms, which is credited as a necessary means for school shootings, and propensity refers to motivation, which is credited as the second crucial element in school shootings. Lee et al. found that Americans’ guns are a necessary ingredient for school shootings - without lethal weapons, the act could not be possible. In fact, more than six in 10 respondents in Lee et al.’s study cited “easy access to weapons” as a cause of school shootings (Lee et al., 2020).

Public perception is created through knowledge gathered on social media, through conversation with peers, and often through news coverage of violent events. Stylianou has theorized that “the relationship between public perceptions of crime as a social problem and media projections of crime is a central issue in the study of the social construction of crime”

(2003, p. 49). The disproportional media coverage of these events, such as Columbine, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas have led to heightened awareness of school shootings as a social problem (Elsass et al., 2014).

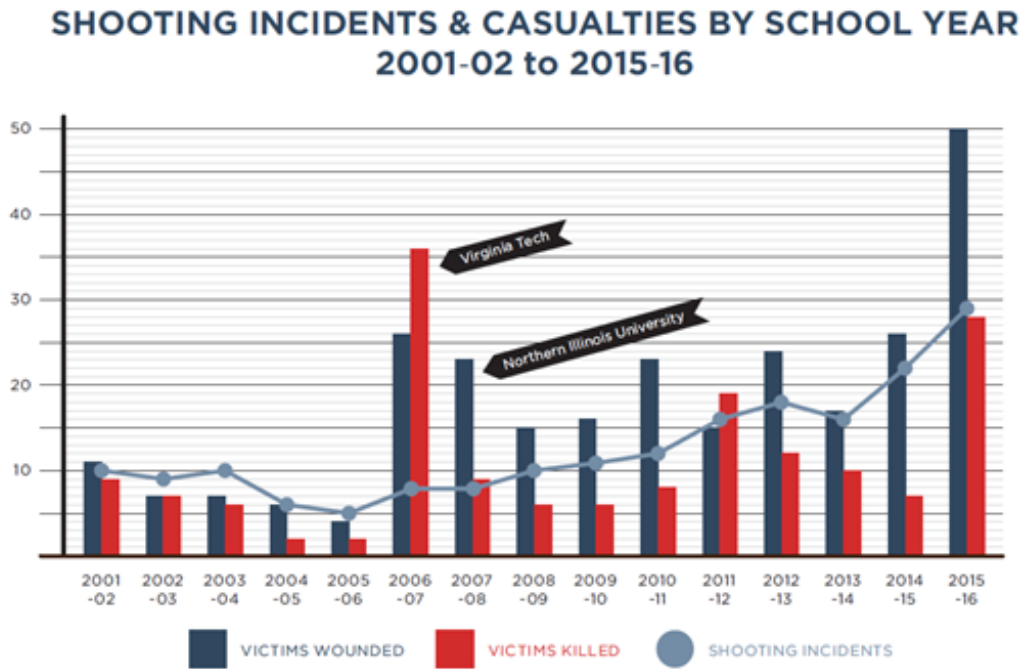
Perception and Reality: College Campus Shootings

Similar to K-12 shootings, college shootings feel more prevalent than they are in reality. A study conducted by the Citizens Crime Commission of New York City looked at shooting incidents when at least one, intentionally shot, victim (excluding the shooter) was injured or killed on a two-year or four-year campus, or within two miles of a college campus and involving at least one student victim (Sutton, 2019). The study found that more than 400 people were shot in 190 college campus shooting incidents at 142 college campuses between the Fall 2001 semester and Spring 2016 semester (Cannon, 2016). Comparing academic years, gun violence increased from 12 incidents in the 2010–2011 academic year to 29 incidents during the 2015–2016 academic year (Sutton, 2019). Interestingly, the increase in shooting incidents was most profound on college campuses in states with increased access to guns (Cannon, 2016).

From the start of the study in Fall 2001, not only have the number of shooting incidents increased but casualties have exponentially grown. Of the 190 incidents studied, 437 people were shot with 167 fatally wounded (Sutton, 2019). Cannon (2016) compared 2001-2006 academic years with 2011-2016 academic years and found that casualties increased by 241 percent and shooting incidents, themselves, increased by 153 percent. The report included a helpful table showing shooting incidents by year and the number of victims wounded and killed, which is reproduced in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Shooting Incidents and Casualties by School Year 2001-2016



Note. Reproduced from Cannon, 2016, p. 2

Cannon (2016) also drew conclusions between the number of incidents in a state and their gun laws. The researcher found that the highest number of incidents “occurred on or near campuses in Tennessee (14), California (14), Virginia (13), Georgia (13), North Carolina (11), and Florida (11)” (Cannon, 2016, p. 3). Cannon’s findings reveal that southern states account for 64 percent of the total campus shootings. Twelve states experienced more than five shooting incidents during the time of Cannon’s study. In the same twelve states, access to guns is plentiful with more than 60,000 federally licensed dealers accounting for 44 percent of the total licensed gun dealers across the nation. These states are missing common gun control policies that are in place in other states like “short-term renewable licensing with safety training requirements,

universal background checks, providing full discretion to the issuing official to grant or deny a carry permit, and limits on multiple gun sales within 30-days” (Cannon, 2016, p. 3).

Cannon (2016) found that 59 percent of shooters were not associated with the college in any way, 28 percent were students, nine percent were former students, and the smallest group, employees, accounted for four percent. Identifying the cause of shootings is often difficult but Cannon identified circumstances of concern leading up to the shooting in 149 of the 190 total cases. Disputes were the leading contributing circumstance to a college shooting, accounting for 38 percent of incidents. The second highest related circumstance was robbery, accounting for 21 percent. Less common predicating events included drugs, involved in 12 percent of cases, specifically targeted students and/or employees in 11 percent of cases, domestic violence in seven percent of cases, rampages with mass casualties accounted for five percent, and four percent involved shooters who were denied entry to or kicked out of a party (Cannon, 2016).

The Citizens Crime Commission of New York City made final suggestions to improve safety for students on college campuses. The first suggestion was aimed at legislators to tighten gun laws to lessen accessibility (Cannon, 2016). Second, the commission recommended colleges work closely with law enforcement. “Collaboration between these two groups will make it easier to identify potential threats off-campus and more quickly respond when nonstudent shooters endanger the lives of college students and employees” (Cannon, 2016, p. 8).

The Role of Media Coverage

Multiple studies find that news exposure influences public attitudes, often fostering views of crime as disproportionately violent (Lee et al., 2020; Pickett et al., 2015). In Madriz’s (1997) book *Nothing Bad Happens to Good Girls: Fear of Crime in Women's Lives*, she described a study where she used focus groups and in-depth interviews to understand how women in New

York City perceive the threat of crime in their day-to-day lives. Madriz reported that interviewees identified the news and media as both the source of their fears and how they validated those fears. “Known as the media-effects theory, it is argued that many fears are ‘off-base’ because the media coverage misrepresents the degree and extent of different problems and is often driven by ratings” (Kaminski et al., 2010, p. 90).

The public appetite for sensational and often horrific events is amplified by media reporting. Glasser (2010) argued, “Disproportionate coverage in the news media plainly has effects on readers and viewers” (p. 113). Glasser provided examples of media influence creating fear over a school shooting epidemic that was merely anomalous. In the 1990s, news outlets began to report on juvenile crime as an epidemic, which was bolstered by school shooting incidents and President Bill Clinton stating, “We know we’ve got about six years to turn this juvenile crime thing around or our country is going to be living in chaos” (Glasser, 2010, p. xxii). These influences occurred at the same time the juvenile crime rate had fallen 9.2% from the previous year. This was further complicated by three school shootings in Mississippi, Kentucky, and Arkansas between 1997 and 1998. Glasser (2010) explained the media sensationalizing stories against the information shared by professional criminologists:

Young people failed to accommodate the trend hawkers [looking for youth crime]. None committed mass murder. Fear of killer kids remained very much in the air nonetheless. In stories on topics such as school safety and childhood trauma, reporters recapitulated the gory details of the killings. And the news media made a point of reporting every incident in which a child was caught at school with a gun or making a death threat. In May, when a fifteen-year-old in Springfield, Oregon, did open fire in a cafeteria filled with students, killing two and wounding twenty-three others, the event felt like a continuation of a

“disturbing trend” (*New York Times*). The day after the shooting, on National Public Radio’s “All Things Considered,” the criminologist Vincent Schiraldi tried to explain that the recent string of incidents did not constitute a trend, that youth homicide rates had declined by 30 percent in recent years, and more than three times as many people were killed by lightning than by violence at schools. But the show’s host, Robert Siegel, interrupted him. “You’re saying these are just anomalous events?” he asked, audibly peeved. The criminologist reiterated that anomalous is precisely the right word to describe the events, and he called it “a grave mistake” to imagine otherwise. Yet, given what happened in Mississippi, Kentucky, Arkansas, and Oregon, could anyone doubt that today’s youths are “more likely to pull a gun than make a fist,” as Katie Couric declared on the “Today” show? (p. xxii)

These early examples were recorded before the occurrence of the Columbine High School shooting, which is credited as the event causing a media boom of school shooting coverage.

Columbine was unique, not because it was the first school-related shooting in North America, but because mass media shifted the message of an isolated incident to a national threat to our children and educational system (Jonson, 2017; King & Bracy, 2019). More recently, when reviewing media coverage of mass shootings and the aftermath (e.g., Parkland students and the #NeverAgain Movement), news exposure might increase common attributions and causal explanations such as gun access, linking shootings to mental illness, and bullying (Lee et al., 2020). Importantly, “the media coverage of school shootings focuses disproportionately on incidents with high casualties (e.g., Columbine, Sandy Hook, Marjory Stoneman Douglas), potentially inspiring a moral panic of excessive fear” (Lee et al., 2020, p. 26). Livingston et al. (2019) found that most media attention has focused on school shootings with multiple victims

occurring in majority-white schools, though about 61 percent of school shootings in their database occurred in majority non-white schools. An example of this can be found in coverage of the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School shooting in Parkland, Florida. Analyses of digital publications determine that the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School shooting, fitting the description of a majority white school experiencing a shooting with multiple victims, received more news coverage than other mass shootings, illustrating the highly public nature of the event (O'Neill et al., 2019).

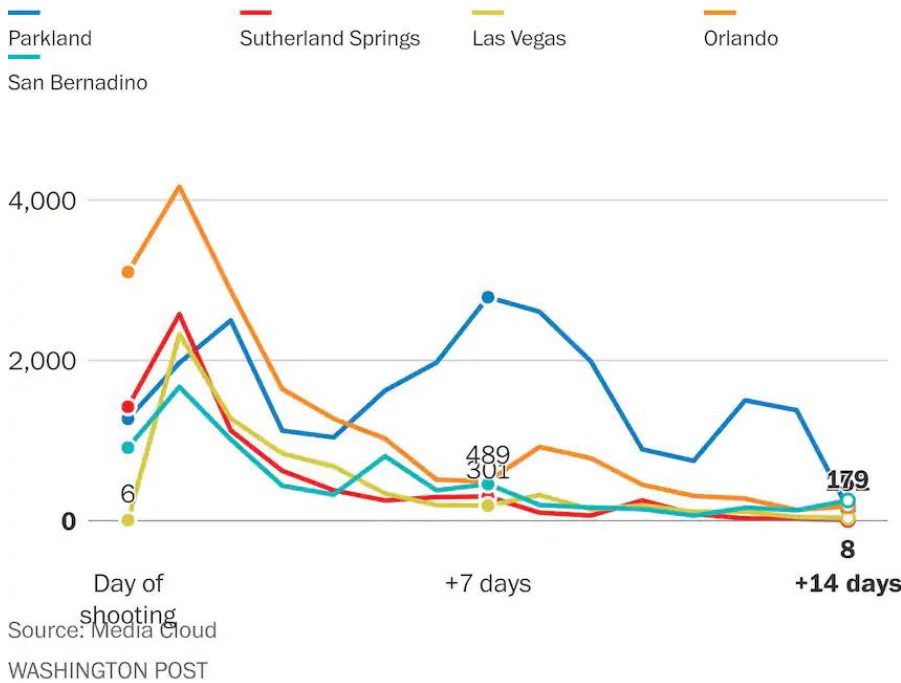
The Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School shooting was one of the most publicized school shootings in history. Media outlets across the nation ran more than 7,900 stories online about the school shooting in the two weeks after the shooting (Siegel, 2019). This coverage outlasted coverage of other mass shootings with a focus on the message of surviving students calling for gun regulations (Siegel, 2019). The graph in Figure 2 shows the peak of online news coverage of each shooting and the decline to little or no coverage by day 14, with the Parkland shooting far outlasting coverage of comparative shooting coverage.

Figure 2

Online Media Coverage of Mass Shootings Including Parkland, Sutherland Springs, Las Vegas, Orlando, and San Bernardino

Online media coverage of mass shootings

Share of online news stories



Note. Reproduced from Siegel, 2019.

Coverage of mass casualties, like school shootings, often receive significant media coverage which has a far reach, regardless of the number of hours one spent consuming news (Lee et al., 2020). Scholars now realize that knowing the nature of the content “is integral to determining not only if a media effect occurs but also which way media consumption directs public opinion” (Lee et al., 2020, p. 27). Many scholars have emphasized that measuring media consumption is different from measuring the actual content consumed (Pickett et al., 2015; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). Newer research has found about 95% of adolescents have access to smartphones (PEW Research Center, 2018), and youth may be more receptive to news found on social media platforms (O’Neill et al., 2019). “The potential media effects on perceptions of crime may be more salient among the emerging generation of adolescents who grew up with the ubiquity of social media and electronic devices” (O’Neill et al., 2019, p. 119).

Fear of Crime

Fear of crime or victimization has been studied related to a variety of factors including school shootings and active shooter trainings. “Being afraid of victimization - a fear that stems from the lived environment - increases the felt importance of personal protection efforts, including firearm acquisition” (Lee et al., 2020, p. 9). Kaminski et al. (2010) surveyed nearly 2,000 students before and after the Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University school shootings. They found that these school shootings significantly increased fear of being victimized on campus and fear of crime in general (Peterson et al., 2015). Previous studies found relationships between fear of crime among campus community members (students and faculty) and contextual factors, such as time of day and particular areas on campus (Kaminiski et al., 2010). Kaminiski and colleagues found that female college students reported substantially higher levels of fear of crime and victimization than their male counterparts. This fear led to female students exhibiting constrained behaviors to reduce their risk of victimization on campus compared to male students (Kaminski et al., 2010).

Studies suggest that school mass shootings can increase fear regardless of geographical proximity to the event (Kaminiski et al., 2010; Stretesky & Hogan, 2001). Stretesky and Hogan found perceived safety among women enrolled at Rochester Institute of Technology decreased following the Columbine shooting. “In addition, because of greater perceived exposure, students who resided on campus were expected to be more fearful of crime on campus than those who resided off campus” (Kaminski et al., 2010, p. 91). More recent studies of this concept were completed following the Marjory Stoneman Douglas mass shooting. Similar to the study based on Columbine, Marjory Stoneman Douglas had substantial news coverage. An analysis of digital publications determined that the school shooting received more news coverage over a 14-day

period than other mass shootings, further illustrating the highly public nature of the shooting (Siegel, 2019).

After the highly publicized Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, O'Neill et al. (2019) completed a study to assess the extent to which a highly publicized school shooting might affect students' fear of victimization and perceptions of school safety. Previous findings suggest that when individuals have shared identities with victims, they more frequently express increased fear of victimization (Chiricos et al., 1997; O'Neill et al., 2019). An illustration of this might be white suburban women watching recounts of violent acts against other white women in suburbs on the news – the viewers are more likely to experience effects of this exposure than others of different demographic characteristics than the victims (Chiricos et al., 1997). O'Neill et al. (2019) found that the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting event influenced the way students perceived their environment, “potentially leading them to take greater notice of safety threats or characterize school issues as a greater problem than they had previously” (p. 126). Though the shooting event had no statistically significant influence on students' avoidance behaviors or perceived risk of victimization (O'Neill et al., 2019). The study went on to examine how long the effects of the school shooting lasted on participants in the study.

Interestingly, O'Neill et al. (2019) found that there was a “decaying effect” of feelings left by the school shooting event (p. 131). While we know that individuals feel more connected with victims that are similar to themselves – even schools with similar composition, primarily white and middle-class schools, felt less connected within five weeks of the shooting. The study explained, “the Parkland Effect was largely absent by five weeks post-shooting. Even with the heightened social and mass media coverage after the shooting, the effect on student attitudes appears transient” (O'Neill et al., 2019, p. 131).

Fear of Victimization Among College Students

Scholars have explored fear of crime and victimization among college students following the occurrence of a college campus shooting. Schildkraut et al. (2015) examined the key attributes that regulate college student beliefs about school shootings using quantitative data. Following high profile college shootings like incidents at the University of Texas at Austin (1966), Virginia Tech University (2007), and Northern Illinois University (NIU) (2008), researchers examined “the potential fear and panic generated among college students” by these events (Schildkraut et al., 2015, p. 92). Schildkraut et al. found that females are more fearful of crime than males, both in the general population and among college students. The researchers also found that females were less likely than men to say that students and faculty with gun licenses should be able to carry guns on campus. They discovered that females were less likely than males to believe that school shootings are unpredictable events (Schildkraut et al., 2015). Other studies have had similar outcomes. Kaminski et al. (2010) examined fear of crime following the Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University shootings and found that female students were significantly more fearful than their male counterparts. Females were also more fearful than male participants of being murdered on campus and being threatened with a knife or gun on campus. Kaminski et al. learned that following the Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois shootings, fears of crime and murder were significantly increased. The researchers also explored how specific demographics of the students related to fear. Younger students and students who lived on campus were found to be more fearful than their respective counterparts. White students were less fearful of becoming a victim of crime on campus than minority students. Researchers identified a fear of walking alone on campus after dark associated with the Virginia Tech shooting (Kaminski et al., 2010). Fallahi et al., (2009) also studied reactions to the Virginia Tech

shooting and found that participating students who reported higher levels of fear and greater belief that a similar college shooting would happen. Interestingly, these same students also expressed beliefs that it was unlikely that a shooting could happen on their campus (Fallahi et al., 2009).

Other researchers have examined fear of crime in college students following a K-12 school shooting incident. Stretesky and Hogan (2001) studied female students at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) one week before and after Columbine about campus dating-violence. They found that participants' perceived safety decreased following the Columbine High School shooting. Addington (2003) reported that general fear of crime slightly increased following the Columbine shooting. Though, the majority of participants, 77 percent, reported not being fearful at school. These studies support the notion that K-12 school shootings influence college students' fear of crime, though the effect may be small. Additionally, these two studies suggest that K-12 shootings may increase fear regardless of geographical proximity and also find that fear of school shootings can be generalized by college students regardless of the event happening at a K-12 school (Stretesky & Hogan, 2010). Schildkraut et al.'s (2015) research findings illustrate that fear of crime is the most salient predictor of participants' moral panic about school shootings. They made an important distinction that it is fear of personal victimization rather than property victimization that is correlated with moral panic about school shootings - students who fear for their personal safety are more likely to believe that school shootings are occurring much more frequently than they realistically occur (Schildkraut et al., 2015).

Mental Health Following a College Shooting

Experiencing a school shooting is a traumatic incident which may influence mental health of survivors of the incident. Seibert et al. (2018) examined the effects of a university campus shooting incident on the development of post-traumatic stress symptoms and problematic alcohol use among a sample of faculty, staff, and students. The researchers sought to understand the likelihood that post-traumatic stress symptoms or problematic alcohol consumption would arise after trauma exposure specifically in those who sought psychological counseling. The study is based on a 2014 incident at Seattle Pacific University where a single gunman shot four students, killing one, before he was tackled by another student and apprehended. In response to the traumatic event, the university provided many crisis intervention options to campus including individual and group counseling, religious services, and art therapy. Some of the debriefing activities included, “reviewing the facts of the incident, brief check ins, normalizing responses, discussing common reactions to crisis, providing resources and referrals, teaching healthy coping strategies, engaging in action planning, using prayer (if appropriate), and following up with individuals if needed” (Siebert et al., 2018, p. 184). The study results explain that physical and emotional proximity to a campus shooting, as well as prior traumatic exposure, predicted alcohol-related problems. Previous studies have shown a strong relationship between post-traumatic stress and alcohol use disorders in college aged adults; conversely, this study found that problematic alcohol use can develop in the short term when students are exposed to a traumatic campus event resulting in post-traumatic stress symptoms. Alcohol may be a way to cope with emotional distress, and lead to possible temporary relief. “This pattern of use is concerning, as individuals who drink alcohol to cope with distress have been shown to experience more negative consequences than those who do not engage in alcohol use to cope”

(Siebert et al., 2018, p. 189). These findings further support the importance of crisis intervention following traumatic campus events.

Reffi et al. (2021) investigated how undergraduate women use mental health services, using pre-shooting emotion dysregulation and posttraumatic cognitions as predictors, following a campus shooting while controlling for time, age, and post-shooting posttraumatic stress and depressive symptoms. Reffi and colleagues pointed out that within the context of mass shootings, there is sparse data available concerning mental health and service utilization following the shooting event. This study sought to provide clarity to mental health influences following the shooting at Northern Illinois University. The sample consisted of 483 undergraduate women who were engaged in a study prior to the shooting incident. The researchers implemented a post-shooting adjustment to monitor the same women to complete the longitudinal study using data from the pre-shooting and post-shooting assessments. Results show that pre-shooting emotion dysregulation and post-shooting mental health symptoms were the most significant predictors of mental health service utilization following the college shooting. Their findings suggest that women exposed to a college mass shooting engage in mental health treatment when needed; however, preexisting emotion dysregulation may create a barrier for those who go on to develop depression. The reason for the barrier is unknown and likely varied across the sample. Reffi et al. (2021) explained,

Given the uncontrollable and unpredictable nature of a mass shooting, the development of depressive symptoms among women who already had trouble regulating their emotions may have engendered a passive coping response that led to avoidance of therapy—an expression of depressive behavior known as learned helplessness. (p. 6)

Conversely, women who are better able to regulate their emotions may be more comfortable expressing and experiencing their emotions, making them more likely to seek mental health services when developing depressive symptoms (Reffi et al., 2021). For example, a previous study found that “pre-shooting functioning and emotion regulation distinguish between those who experience prolonged distress following mass violence and those who gradually recover” (Orcutt et al., 2014, p. 249).

Student Performance Following a School Shooting

Beland and Kim (2016) analyzed how fatal shootings in high schools influence student performance, behavior, and enrollment in school using affect data from shooting databases, school report cards, and the Common Core of Data. The researchers examined school test scores, enrollment, number of teachers, graduation rates, student attendance records, and suspension rates after experiencing a school shooting. This information was compared to information from similar schools in the same California school district. This study is unique in that it explores the direct influence of surviving a school shooting (Beland & Kim, 2016).

Beginning with enrollment following a school shooting, the study found a decline in ninth grade enrollment relative to similar schools in the same district (Beland & Kim, 2016). They found a 5.8% decline in ninth grade enrollment for the average school experiencing a shooting. This suggests that following a high school shooting, some middle school students and their families avoid transitioning to the building or school that experienced the act of violence. While ninth grade enrollment suffered, enrollment in other grades did not statistically significantly change and the number of teachers in the school remained the same with no statistically significant change. Findings suggest that students and teachers who already have an established connection with the school may not find a need to transfer to another school. Another reason

could be the administrative difficulty to switch school districts deters upper-class students and their families from switching schools (Beland & Kim, 2016).

The most significant change observed in the Beland and Kim (2016) study was performance in English and math standardized tests. Their findings demonstrate that the proficiency rate in math fell 4.9 percentage points following a school shooting. Regarding English standardized tests, the consequence of experienced shootings was a slightly smaller magnitude, 3.9 percentage points lower than the comparison schools. Standardized test scores in math and English remained lower in affected schools for up to three years following a deadly shooting (Beland & Kim, 2016).

Lastly, there was no detrimental effect on suspension, graduation, or average daily attendance rates following a deadly shooting (Beland & Kim, 2016). The study is important in determining widespread changes in school districts after experiencing a school shooting. Mainly, an enrollment declines in ninth grade students and declining standardized test scores in math and English for students who remain enrolled at the school for up to three years following the shooting incident. Beland and Kim found that on average, students indicate they are highly affected when there is a school shooting. They suggest that policymakers consider preventive measures including gun control laws and more resources should be available to students in the aftermath of shootings (Beland & Kim, 2016).

Beland and Kim (2016) provided a unique study as it assessed school shooting survivors to examine the short-term effects of experiencing a traumatic event. The researchers suggest that more long-term research be done to examine the influence of school shootings on student lives (Beland & Kim, 2016). The current study seeks to narrow the gap in research on longer-term influence of school shootings. While this study sought answers to student experience

transitioning into college and functioning in college, there is still room for continued research following college. Beland and Kim found evidence of lasting influence over student experience, but the lasting impact remains unknown.

Conclusion

Influence of school shootings is still an under-researched area of literature. Fear of crime is a well-studied area explaining how shared demographics or identities can lead to more fear of victimization. The decaying effect that explains how students are less effected by a school shooting that they were not involved in after five weeks (O’Neill et al., 2019), suggests the need for research focused on how the decaying effect is influenced by media coverage or geographical location. Beland and Kim (2016) answered many questions about how school districts can be affected following a school shooting. They answered questions about academic performance, attendance, and conduct. This section reviewed research done on the perception of K-12 shootings, the perception of college shootings, the role of media coverage, how school shootings influence fear of crime, fear of victimization among college students, mental health considerations after a campus shooting, and the effect of school shootings on student performance. Long-term effects are still unknown and a viable area for future inquiry. This study seeks to fill a gap in the literature explaining long-term effects of school shootings on survivors specifically related to their transition to and within college.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored literature focused on three major subsections – college transition, college experience, and the influence of school shootings. As we know, school shootings are relatively rare events in comparison with many other crimes; however, they are a considerable cause for concern due to their impact, not only on the school students, faculty, staff,

and victims but also on the local community, as well as the fear they create in schools across the nation (Gerard et al., 2015). A wealth of knowledge exists concerning social influences on school shootings and how they are perceived and understood by society. Researchers have studied how media influences perception about school shootings and how that perception influences students across the country.

While a breadth of research exists on violent school shooting attacks, little research explains the experience of surviving students. Researchers have identified possible challenges for surviving students regarding mental health and feelings of safety or belonging after a potentially traumatic event. Previous research explains fear of crime or victimization following a school shooting and how mental health services play a role in recovery. Still, little is known about how surviving students of a K-12 school shooting are influenced by their experience when leaving the school and transitioning to college. No previous research examines the role of student advocacy after surviving a traumatic event or college student performance or success after surviving a K-12 school shooting.

The present study will explore the stories of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting survivors as they transition to college, experience higher education, and make career goals and decisions. Previous research often focuses on the shooter, school safety, and short-term effects of experiencing a school shooting. This study seeks to narrow the gap in school shooting research that focuses on surviving victims of a violent attack and the influence it has long-term on their goals and experiences.

Chapter Three: Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce narrative inquiry as the research methodology used to explore how the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSDHS) shooting has influenced student survivors in their transition to and experiences in higher education. Narrative inquiry provided a deeper understanding through narrative retelling of the perceptions, decisions, and experiences of MSDHS shooting survivors. This chapter describes the design of the study, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity/reliability, researcher positioning, limitations, and ethical considerations.

Design of the Study

This study was conducted through a constructionist/interpretivist narrative inquiry exploring how the MSDHS shooting has influenced the transition to, and experience in, college for students that survived this traumatic event. Constructivists believe that there is no objective truth waiting to be discovered rather, “meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 2015, p. 8). Using a narrative lens allowed a deep understanding of how experiencing and surviving the school shooting influenced participants’ life stories across different contexts. “Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). In the context of this study, storytelling was used to understand student experiences using the MSDHS shooting as an anchor or phenomenon through which the story is told.

For clear understanding of the student experience, the study focused on three main elements of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). These

commonplaces (as referred to by Clandinin and Huber) provide a conceptual framework for narrative inquiry. “Through attending to the commonplaces, narrative inquirers are able to study the complexity of the relational composition of people’s lived experiences both inside and outside of an inquiry and, as well, to imagine the future possibilities of these lives” (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 3).

The MSDHS shooting is a temporal event that has played different roles in the survivors’ lives as time passes. We, as humans, continually revise our stories as new experiences shape our views and futures. Narrative inquiry requires the researcher to consider the temporality of places, things, and events along with the temporality of their participants’ lives (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Sociality is the second commonplace that simultaneously tends to personal conditions and social conditions. Personal conditions are “the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480) of the inquirer and participants. Social conditions refer to the social environment or conditions under which people’s experiences and events unfold (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Sociality considers elements of cultural, social, institutional, and linguistic narratives (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). An important aspect of the sociality commonplace highlights the relationship between researcher and participant because researchers cannot subtract themselves from the inquiry relationship (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Lastly, place refers to “the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Narrative inquirers, like Marmon Silko (1996), believe our identities are inextricably linked with our experiences in a particular place and with stories we tell of these experiences (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

The design of this study is a narrative inquiry into the experiences of MSDHS shooting survivors as they transition to and experience college. Special consideration was given to temporality, sociality, and place as the narrative of their lives was explored. The design of this study was selected to explore participant experiences while understanding that everything shared is unique to their own lives and stories. Findings are not transferrable; however, commonalities may be highlighted between participant stories.

Sample Selection

A purposeful sampling method was used to focus on survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting in this study. Purposeful sampling is appropriate to “discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore [the researcher] must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). In this study I interviewed participants who have information-rich memories and experiences from which to learn. These information-rich cases are of central importance to the purpose of this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Maximum variation sampling was important to seek out those who represent the widest possible range of identities while still sharing the school shooting experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To accomplish this goal, students with a variety of identities (i.e., race, age, gender) representing different facets of the phenomenon were approached to participate in this study. Individual outreach secured the first three participants; then, exponential discriminative snowball sampling was employed to engage with more students until the sample size reached three to five participants. Snowball sampling was chosen to broaden participant recruitment and provide an opportunity to work with a variety of students from different graduation years. Participants were asked to suggest students with different experiences like graduation year, higher education institution, or different experience during the MSDHS shooting.

Data Collection

Narrative interview was the primary method of data collection. “In one-to-one situations, participants are asked to tell their stories in a variety of ways: by responding to... interview questions; by engaging in conversation or dialogue; by telling stories triggered by various artifacts such as photographs” (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 5). Interviewing was necessary in this study because the researcher cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how participants are interpreting the world around them as related to a past event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Narrative interviews were appropriate for this study as they allowed participants to tell their stories through semi-structured interviews which resulted in stories of tensions, conflicts, and resolutions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Semi-structured format was used to “allow the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to the new ideas on the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). Participants were spread throughout the country at different colleges and universities so virtual meeting spaces were used to increase the flexibility and frequency of meetings. Zoom (zoom.us) was the primary platform used to facilitate and record interviews.

A secondary data source was existing documents. These items existed before the interviews and may provide background detail of the event, experience, and advocacy of these students prior to college and this study. Documents included books written by the students, social media posts, newspaper articles, interviews with major media outlets, photographs, information released by the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Police Reports of the incident, and Blogs or Vlogs (video blogs). Permission was requested to quote or use content from students’ personal social media accounts. Students were be asked to submit documents or artifacts to be

shared and explained in a second interview. These documents or artifacts were used to conceptualize the narrative being told by participants.

The data collection focused on the expressed narrative of student survivors of the MSDHS shooting and their transition to college. With the purpose of telling the story of how participants have been influenced by their experience surviving a school shooting and how that may have influenced their transition to and performance in higher education, interviews focused on these areas. Interviews began with a brief overview of high school memories, emotions, and experiences. Most of the conversation was based on the experience transitioning to college, defined as the time from committing to a college through the first month of being on campus. Then, we explored participant college experiences and how their high school experience might have influenced their time in college.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed beyond language structures and thematic coding to analyze the broader story uncovering how participants make sense of their experiences and link past, present, and future (Grbich, 2013). Interviews were transcribed and endured several rounds of editing. The first round of transcription included all text and main functions of the interview such as pauses, laughing, or crying (Esin et al., 2014). Next, the interviews were re-transcribed to add greater detail including emphases, false starts, and utterances like ‘uhm’ (Esin et al., 2014). Transcriptions were continually reviewed to include tone, pitch, and other possible vocal characteristics, increasing detail with each new version of transcription (Esin et al., 2014).

While transcription is imperative, coding was unnecessary in narrative design. Stories were not deconstructed into coded groups for analysis. Clandinin and Huber (2010) explained that deconstructing stories into coded groups undermines the goals of narrative inquiry by

directing attention away from the story and experience. Grbich (2013) explained, “The segmentation of themes and other forms of fragmentation such as coding is avoided in this process as the stories that are told are complete entities in themselves and resist such processes” (p. 221).

Decisions about what to include and how to structure the transcriptions “have serious implications for how a reader will understand the narrative” (Esin et al., 2014, p. 11). Transcriptions of the interview were used to select narrative segments for closer analysis (Grbich, 2013). These narrative segments were explored through the context of the story and the meaning expressed by the participant. Further, the narrative segments were compared to different participants’ stories looking at commonalities in participant experiences using the MSDHS shooting as an anchor in their narrative (Grbich, 2013). Once the transcriptions were examined, narrative segments were organized to retell the participants’ stories focusing on experiences and emotions guided by temporality, sociality, and place.

Field notes about the interview situation and interactions were taken directly after interviews to include relevant details in transcriptions (Esin et al., 2014). The video recording of the interviews is included as field notes. Lastly, participants were asked to share pictures, social media posts, poetry, or any other expression that may help tell the story of their experiences that are kept as field notes used to create a narrative.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability were achieved through participant feedback and approval of conclusions and interpretations of their narrative. Participants were asked for feedback on the analysis of their stories to ensure their voice was not overwritten by the researcher (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Clandinin and Huber explained,

Ongoing negotiation with participants allows narrative inquirers to create research texts that both critically and deeply represent narrative inquirers and participants' experiences while also maintaining each person's integrity and their relationship into the future. (2010, p. 13).

An audit trail was kept describing how data were collected, how convergent themes in participant narratives were derived, and how conclusions were drawn (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This was intentional because "good qualitative research gets much of its claim to validity from the researcher's ability to show convincingly how they got there, and how they built confidence that this was the best account possible" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 252).

Researcher Positioning

Narrative inquirers focus on lives as lived and told throughout the inquiry (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The positioning and power relations between researcher and participant can influence the outcome of a narrative (Esin et al., 2014). Esin et al. (2014) identified three voices narrative researchers may use in the process of analyzing to demonstrate how researcher voices may be positioned. The researcher in this study used 'the researcher's authoritative voice' to show separation of the researcher and participant voices (Esin et al., 2014). This positioning will make clear that, as the researcher, I may have a different interest in the narratives under analysis (Esin et al., 2014).

Additionally, it was critical that I put aside my biases or assumptions of these students based on prior research or knowledge of the MSDHS shooting. I was aware of any impressions I formed based on interviews watched, books read, or social media posts analyzed. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained,

Rather than trying to eliminate these biases or ‘subjectivities’ it is important to identify them and monitor them in relation to the theoretical framework and in light of the researcher’s own interests, to make clear how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data. (p. 16)

Any previous impressions I had from media appearance or social media was identified and monitored as data were collected and analyzed.

Limitations

This study is a very narrow topic with a highly specified sample criterion. The transferability of findings may be limited due to these limitations. This study relied on student recall of experiences. Time and space are limitations of the study. Doing an entirely virtual study without following the students on their new campus created limitations of information and observation.

Ethical Considerations

Researching the influence of a school shooting required empathy and well-prepared research plans. It would have been unethical to ask questions about the shooting or experience because it does not apply to the purpose of this study. These students have been interviewed by media frequently and have relived their experience so frequently that it would be unethical to have participants experience their traumas again without reason. The intention was not to force participants to relive trauma but may be a side effect of the narrative interview and storytelling process. With that in mind, contact for counseling services were provided and follow up twenty-four hours after the interview was conducted to ensure student support.

Participants were given a pseudonym, given their status as activists and public figures following the MSDHS shooting. All personal identifiers were removed or changed from the

written data and presentations of analysis (Esin et al., 2014). Transcripts, analysis, and publications were shared with research participants, which is a common practice in narrative studies, enabling the researcher to expand the limits of co-constructed interpretive process and create an ethical and authentic narrative presentation (Esin et al., 2014).

This chapter described the design of the study, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity/reliability, researcher positioning, limitations, and ethical considerations. Narrative inquiry was explained and will be used in this study to examine participant perceptions, decisions, and experiences through the retelling of survivor stories. Chapter four will retell the story of Hannah, Veronica, and Ross through their narratives.

Chapter Four: Findings/Participant Stories

All participants in this study were students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in February of 2018 when a school shooting took place. The participants all participated in advocacy work following the shooting event, namely the March for Our Lives campaign. Each participant has transitioned to college and agreed to share their experiences leaving high school and transitioning to college as a school shooting survivor.

Interviews were conducted in February and March of 2022, four years after the school shooting event took place. This is an important consideration as the anniversary of the shooting was only days from when the first-round interview was conducted with each participant. All participants have left Florida to seek higher education opportunities in different states. They each attend a different school; however, all are private schools. Though these commonalities exist, their stories are unique weaving between formative events throughout their transition and college experience resulting in unparalleled storytelling. Participant names and identifying information have been changed to protect participant confidentiality.

Hannah's Story

Hannah is a 21-year-old junior and government major at an Ivy League school in the Northeast region of North America. Hannah was a junior when the MSDHS shooting occurred in 2018.

High School

Hannah loved high school - she reflected on and explained how her whole high school experience changed after experiencing a school shooting. Hannah was academically gifted, well-liked by her peers, and was involved in a variety of co-curricular activities including Student Government Association, National Honor Society, Math Honor Society, and Spanish Honor

Society, to name a few. Hannah was a well-liked student with a variety of friend groups across the high school. She explained,

I was definitely like very well known, and I was like universally liked and everyone was like, kind of... I don't know like wanted to be my friend, or something, because I was like academically with it, socially with it, and um, just like very involved in a lot of different corners of school.

Hannah was well connected, involved in school, and generally liked by her peers. She was elected class president for three years and experienced leadership roles through student government.

During her junior year, everything changed for Hannah. The school shooting happened and shortly after she became a co-founder of the March for Our Lives Organization. She explains,

The shooting happens my junior year. Um... and... honestly all, basically all of that [previous high school experience] changes. Um... so my like involvement with March for Lives um... was a like a big part of obviously my, the remainder of my junior year and all through my senior year of high school. And... in, in getting involved with March for Lives. I obviously acquired a brand-new friend group because most of the people involved in March for Lives were not formerly my friends.

Hannah became involved in March for Our Lives when she was recruited to start the organization by a friend. Her peers questioned Hannah's motivation and involvement in March for Our Lives, making assumptions about her motives. She explained that she was involved in March for Our Lives to honor those who were lost; while her peers thought she was involved to

meet celebrities, be in magazines, be on television, and gain personal recognition. She lost friends over her involvement in March for Our Lives and began to feel isolated in high school.

But some people still don't talk to me this, to this day, like I lost a few good friends because of my involvement in March and so... That kind of sucked and I kind of like put myself in a corner at school... just kind of like sat in the shadows for the last year of my high school career... that really sucked, and um is kind of like mixed up and like a lot of the trauma of that. Because, like, losing like dozens of friends at once, like it's really not fun.

Hannah reflected on the experiences after the school shooting commenting, “everyone was hurting, and I was just like an easy target to like put that pain and anger onto.” She persevered through the criticism at school to continue her advocacy work. She dove deeply into protests and meetings with lawmakers throughout the rest of her high school tenure to make a difference and to give herself a reprieve.

I would miss school a lot senior year because I was traveling and doing things for March, and I also wanted to do everything I could to avoid being at school. On the one hand because of like the trauma from the shooting but on the other hand, the trauma of having so many people who were formerly my friends not be my friend anymore.

While balancing school, advocacy, and travel, Hannah needed to consider future plans for her education and career.

Before the school shooting, Hannah was considering a job in nursing. The school shooting and March for Our Lives changed everything. She previously planned to stay in Florida for college and attend the University of Florida. After scoring highly on the SAT, Hannah began

considering more rigorous colleges like Duke or University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Time continued to pass, and Hannah continued to ponder her options.

The more I was like, “Do I really want to go to Florida school and have to see all these people every day for the next four years of my life when they all hate me? Probably not!” Um, so I actually didn't even apply to any Florida schools, and I never saw that coming, but it was because I so desperately wanted to get away from everyone and everything. Like, so far away, and I also didn't have very much time to apply, because I was so busy with March. So, my uh - I don't know, stupid self, like thank goodness it worked out, but I only applied to Harvard, Yale, and Princeton.

Hannah was encouraged by a mentor working with the March for Our Lives students to organize their tour. She explained that her mentor, a political organizer hired to help the students navigate their advocacy endeavors, convinced her that she would be admitted to an Ivy League school. Hannah recalled that her priority was March for Our Lives and gun control advocacy while her college applications were put aside.

I'm like reviewing this and I just - I literally didn't have any time and I was like, my mentor so convinced me that I was getting into [an Ivy League school], like, it was almost like there was no other way it could go, and so I was just like... F-it, I don't have enough time, I'm just gonna apply to the three best schools and like see what happens.

Hannah was admitted to one school, waitlisted by another, and rejected by the third. Reflecting on her college admissions process, Hannah is grateful it worked out considering she did not have a backup plan. When asked about other influences on her college decision Hannah explained,

I was very like... influenced by adult figures around me. So, it was like my mentor telling me that I should go to [an Ivy League school], but it was also like so many adults even people I didn't know like on social media and stuff telling me that, like I'm going to like be so successful in my life. And so, in my head like, the successful people in politics, they go to Ivy League schools. And I was like, this makes sense for my narrative that I'm creating for myself, which is like such an awful thing to like, force a child to think about.

She also discussed safety considerations. As a public figure advocating for gun control, she received safety threats through social media. Hannah discussed that she felt safer in a Northeastern school with more strict gun laws than those of Florida. “[This state] is the safest state, I could possibly be in so that's really comforting.” She continued to talk about family support and influence during this time. Much of her discussion reflected a forced independence that she was plunged into following the school shooting.

Yeah, they were always supportive, like they honestly gave me a lot of autonomy at the end of high school because I was so independent with March and stuff. Like, I would travel on my own. I went to Africa by myself... So, at that point in my life like, they had trusted me and knew I was competent enough that they actually weren't really involved in my college decision process or application process at all.

Hannah describes her time following the school shooting as a whirlwind. She was traveling, planning major events, meeting with legislators, and generally keeping busy. There was not much time to think about college and what lay ahead.

College Transition

Hannah describes the summer of 2019, before she transitioned to college, as the “weirdest part of [her] life... to this point.” She began slowing her involvement in March for Our Lives and began to process emotions from high school trauma. Friendships were evolving and Hannah began to feel the gravity of lost friendships.

It had been like a year plus since everything happened, and people were just starting to care less... understandably, because it wasn't, you know, recent anymore. People still cared, and like March for our Lives was still a thing and it's still a thing today. But... at that point, a few people have already gone to college from March, because the shooting happened when they were seniors. Um, and a lot of people, just like stopped because they were burnt out. I was really like slowing down my March for Our Lives involvement because I was just exhausted and burnt out and didn't want to be like too crazy involved when I got to college. Um... and so in that time period, I actually, that was when I like really started to mourn the people I had lost in high school, like friendship wise.

Hannah kept herself busy from the time the school shooting happened through her high school graduation. She used a busy schedule and advocacy work as a coping method for her changing life. She described trauma from a school shooting compounded with how her peers perceived her involvement in March for Our Lives. Losing friendships over her involvement in advocacy work was a difficult result of the shooting for Hannah. Though she made friends in March for Our Lives, they were also bound by tragedy which was emotionally difficult.

Because... my March friends and I started like drifting a little bit just because one, they were at college and I was not yet and two, the reality is like we shared so many traumatic experiences together, and so when you have that experience with someone like it's hard to

maintain normal friendship with them. Because... in my opinion, like my March friends and I still talk to one another, nowadays, not so frequently, though, because we just remind each other of like a really traumatic time in our life and that's not the case with everyone but, like, I would say, like more than half of the cofounders I like haven't spoken to and probably a year.... But others yeah, I don't talk to. So, I was like slowly losing a lot of people in March. From going to like the people that I talked to and see every day to like not really even speaking to on a daily basis or weekly basis.

Hannah described evolving friendships that were difficult to cope with before she transitioned to college. March for Our Lives had slowed down and she found a void in the place where advocacy work and friendships once were. Mourning the lost friendships she had before March for Our Lives, she worked to mend friendships and evaluate who would be a support network when she went to college.

And then I was like trying to pick up the pieces of like my broken friendships in high school. Um, and so that was really difficult, so I felt like my friendships were like really unsteady going into college. And I obviously had my family as like a support system... Um, but, yeah, um so that was definitely really hard. I came to college like just not, like, I don't know like feeling like a failure and a bunch of my friendships.

Trauma from her high school years was prevalent and took precedence over the summer before her transition to college. Hannah continued to explain,

I hadn't really processed any of the trauma from the shooting for a really long time. Um, like I obviously felt like large waves of sadness and frustration and anger um, in the year after. But I would say that, like it took me until the summer of 2019 to really start like

feeling the pain of it all. I actually started going to... trauma therapy December 2019 before I went to college.

Hannah took the summer before college to process her pain and learn coping skills through eye movement desensitization reprocessing (EMDR) therapy. She noted her therapist being particularly helpful during this time of transition. Much of Hannah's time was spent processing trauma so she was not preparing for college the way most of her peers were.

Hannah perceived other students using the summer before college to connect with peers, meet roommates, pack clothes, and prepare residence hall supplies in anticipation of moving. Hannah did not prepare quite as thoroughly as many others.

I didn't really connect with anyone going to [my school] before college started, meanwhile, people were already starting to like make friends via social media. Um, and so I was like just so exhausted and defeated from my high school experience. The trauma of it all from the shooting, to build like trying to build back like certain friendships that were really important to me, trying to like process my trauma in therapy.

You know, and like just spending the last few months at home and like trying to enjoy Florida, and like not think of my hometown as like, this most miserable place in the world. Um, and so I focused like that summer a lot on just like trying to better myself and like relax and just like... recharge my incredibly defeated self in so many ways, because I was like yeah...

And so, I, I really didn't think about college or the transition to college much. Like literally two weeks before I had to go to college, I was like oh shit I'm going to college, and I need to like pack. And... yeah but meanwhile like people are preparing the whole

summer before college and getting so excited and connecting with people on social media and meeting their roommates and whatever and like I literally did not give a shit. Until it came to like a couple of days before my flight took off.

Pre-Orientation. When talking about her first few days on campus Hannah remarked, “I think I didn't realize like how messed up, I was until I got to college.” Hannah signed up for a pre-orientation program meant to help students transition to college. The program targeted first generation and low-income students which Hannah did not realize until she arrived. She does not fit into either of those categories and felt like an outsider from the start.

I already was like the odd one out, I felt like everyone was bonding around me over their shared experiences and my experience was just like so unique. Um, because you had to explain like why you were in the program, and I kind of just talked about the shooting and like how I was scared about going to school and just like trying to readjust to schooling life and all of that, and so like people didn't resonate with that. Um, obviously people were nice, but I could not like connect with anyone.

Um, so that first week was really, really tough and like I was alone every night and people were already going out to like hang out and drink and do stuff together, and I have not made like a good friend, at that point, so I spent all of the pre-orientation program alone pretty much.

The pre-orientation program did not help Hannah make friends like she had hoped. After the pre-orientation program, Hannah's mother returned to move her from the temporary housing she was in, into her residence hall.

Roommates. Hannah lived in a residence hall room with two roommates. Both came from private school backgrounds, one being local to the college. Hannah remembers her first night vividly.

That first night I remember like being in the freshman dining hall, and just like walking around and sitting at a random table and talking with people and a lot of people do that it's not like an uncommon thing. ...and then I go back to my room alone and I sit in my room for the rest of the night, and I like cry myself to sleep, because I was like, "I'm so lonely. What is going on?"

Um, and this is when I really like start feeling like. People are just so... they're set up so much differently than I was. When one of my roommates, the one from... really close by. She was already starting to like go out and party, the first night.

Hannah recounted feeling like people came to school with preexisting friendships that would make the transition easier. She felt like she did not have the same support coming to school. Hannah only knew one person from high school who went to the same college. She expressed wanting to find her own way and make her own friends, so she intentionally separated herself from him.

I am like confused in my classes. I'm confused and shy in my like discussion sections and I just can't make friends and it's just like awful. And so, I remember freshman year I actually that was like really, really sad. And a lot, and because of all the free time that I had like not hanging out with people. I don't know, I started to like really grieve. For like just everything, especially like the shooting, and that was really tough. Because I kind of was just like everyone around me so happy... I've experienced so much awful shit in my

life and like these people are so happy and obviously that's not true, like everyone has gone through their own thing. But I really felt like that. I really thought that, like me, having gone through this shooting like was just like this, I was like an anomaly. And... I am an anomaly, like most people don't go through big high school shootings that make national news. But I still... just felt so out of place. Because of that, and because of my upbringing... and so I actually finally, sit down one night and I talked to my other roommate, the one from Alabama who's my roommate now. And she was like so lovely, and I was like oh my God, like my first friend, like my roommate has been sitting in front of me.

Major life transitions, such as moving from a family home to college campus, often create valuable opportunities for growth and change but also potentially cause feelings of self-doubt and loss (Paul & Brier, 2001). Hannah demonstrated feelings of self-doubt and loss in how she described feeling lost in the classroom and having difficulty making friends. She exhibited the common challenges faced by first-year students which included managing increased academic demands, building a new social network, and navigating the increased autonomy of college life (Kroshus et al., 2021).

Most saliently, Hannah discussed the challenges of losing friendships in high school and during her transition to college. Previous studies explain what Hannah discussed as the perceived loss of high school friendship which caused additional stress and impeded her ability to create ties with her new institution and peers (Azmitia et al., 2013; Paul & Brier, 2001). Transitioning to college was admittedly difficult for Hannah. Making friends and finding a network was difficult. Once through the transition period, the first month of school, she continued to have difficulty making friends and connecting.

College

Relationships. Hannah considers herself to be a public figure confirmed by blue verification checkmarks on social media accounts and her Wikipedia page covering her various accomplishments and advocacy involvement. Hannah's roommate expressed the perception of Hannah, and her validation check marks¹ on twitter and Instagram social media platforms.

She was like, "I was intimidated by you, like you were... this like well-known figure... you weren't really talking to many people" ... I was this like public figure with a blue checkmark next to my name on Instagram and Twitter and I wasn't talking to people, so they automatically thought that I had no interest in them. Meanwhile, I'm this like shy, don't know what to do, girl who... literally is just... wanting to make friends, but doesn't know how to talk to people. Um, and so there was definitely like a very big communication thing.... I would say that I didn't make very many friends freshman year because I was just like - I also realized that like going through so much dramatic shit made me really shy. Like I was once the popular everyone knows her like, class president... and then I become this like girl who doesn't know how to like make coherent sentences when talking to new people.

Beyond her peers perceiving her as a public figure, some felt that it was appropriate to ask very personal questions. Others felt that surviving a school shooting was the only topic of conversation they could explore with Hannah.

I got a lot of people come up to me freshman year and like, thank me and like, apologize or just be like, "you're amazing you're inspiring"... and then, when I like wanted to

¹ The Instagram help center explains verification badges as a way for users to identify authentic accounts for celebrities and public figures which have been verified by the social media platform.

continue a conversation, and like a normal way it was always just like power dynamic where they thought I was like this, this like public figure (gesturing with one hand above the other) that was better than them, even though I was like trying to like just even the playing field like (gesturing an effort to put hands on an even level), but they just like kept putting me on a pedestal and it made the conversation really awkward. And so, that was... a really hard part of freshman year, as well, and it just made it hard to connect with people. And when I tried to connect with people, I got questions about the shooting that made me uncomfortable. Like one person literally just like straight up asked me if I knew the shooter one time, without really asking any other questions about me and I was like "Really, like what the hell?"

Despite the perception of Hannah's public life, she was able to create a strong relationship with one of her roommates and another girl on her hall. Building a new social network and making friends is a challenge commonly found when transitioning to college (Kroshus et al., 2021).

Hannah attributes some of her difficulty to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). She explains,

I've actually talked to therapists about this and stuff and like a lot of it is because PTSD causes like, a lot of anxiety and depression. It makes it hard to want to do anything, obviously, and like meet people and makes you - I don't know PTSD makes you feel different from everyone around you. And so, it like subconsciously makes you believe that you're different from everyone else and thus... you can't make deep friendships because they're never going to understand. Um and that's really how I operated... all through freshman year I felt like I was not ever going to make a friend that was closer to me than my friends at home, because my friends at home, and I have been through so much together.

Hannah is still working on building authentic and deep relationships with people who have not experienced the same trauma as she has. She explains how her boyfriend has helped her recognize the possibility of creating deep and meaningful relationships with others.

Um and so, that was... and honestly, in part, I still kind of feel that way. Um, not entirely because I met my boyfriend at the end of freshman year, or not the end of freshman year but in March of freshman year, which is like right before we got kicked off campus for COVID. Um but I met him and like he's my best friend we've been together for almost two years and so I'm like so grateful for him. So, he was kind of like the first person that proved to me that, like, I can become close with someone that didn't know me during that time in my life in high school. Which I really thought was like not the case, I thought, like, I was only ever going to feel a connection with someone who went, went through all that trauma with me. So, thank God for him.

Co-Curricular Involvement. Hannah struggled to make friends and create trusting relationships. To combat these challenges, Hannah got involved on campus with different co-curricular activities. She joined an organization that encouraged students to register to vote, participated in a program that taught civics classes in local elementary schools, and joined a dance company. Students most frequently reported finding friends in residence halls, classes, and student organizations (Yazedjian et al., 2007). Making friends through these avenues made the university environment less overwhelming for students and created a greater sense of attachment with the institution (Yazedjian et al., 2007). Hannah found that the things that helped her make friends in the past were not as helpful in college. She said,

... I joined a dance company because... I grew up dancing actually. Like ballet, jazz, hip hop, all the things so I joined a hip hop dance company here which I'm still involved with, called expressions. And I hoped expressions would give me a lot of friends, because growing up a lot of my friends were dance friends as well. But like, there's something about me that I don't really understand at this point... where I've just like become a really shy person and like introverted and it's definitely worth having conversations with a therapist and like dig into more. But I became that person when I came to college, and I think it was largely because I just felt like I couldn't connect with people here. Um, because no one could share in my life experience. And so, I didn't actually make a lot of friends in my dance company, even though, like I'm cool with people, but like they're not really my good friends.

Making friends and finding a community in college was a challenge for Hannah. She continued to evolve and grow through her time in college which has created more distance between who she was when she transitioned to college and who she is as a Junior.

Academics. Selecting a major is something that every student debates and often changes. Hannah went to school with the intention of going into politics after graduation. Political activism was such a salient part of her identity that she felt it only natural to major in Government. She was convinced by mentors, strangers, and friends that politics would be her life work, but she feels differently now.

But it's not that simple anymore. Because I don't want to run for office, and I don't actually, really want to work in politics and a lot of these things I've like, come to terms with, in the last year, actually. Like it took me a while to kind of like get over that um,

but it was all just people telling me what I should do and like nothing about what I wanted to do. And, quite frankly I don't know what I want to do any more like I literally no idea what I'm going to do with my life.

Um, and I'm just glad that I like got out of the box that people were putting in. And I let them put me in the box. Um, and, and the thing is, is like, it makes me kind of sad because I missed out on like age 17, 18, 19, 20 of like figuring out what my likes are. Likes and dislikes. Like, I never considered any other, anything, you know coming to college. I literally saw the government department; I was like that's my major that's it period... and I'm happy like I'm majoring in government... I enjoy learning about the government and like theories and stuff.

Um so, I'm not like sad and I'm not like trying to change my major but I never took an economics class, I never took a psychology class, I never did, you know, anything in STEM, though I don't think I would have wanted to do that or humanities, like, I really didn't look at anything.

Um, because I was just like this is my life and I'm just here to follow, and you know, like I don't know fulfill the prophecy of this narrative that like people have created for its, a 17-year-old basically.

Hannah expresses a lot of doubt about her future and some regret from allowing others to influence her major and future. She credits COVID-19 for her ability to step away from many of her advocacy roles and co-curricular involvements. The pandemic gave her time to think about how she wanted to be involved and what that meant for her time, future, identity, and mental health.

I just have kind of abandoned that part of myself... I still kind of like do things here and there, with March for Lives. I like do interviews for them if they need like a founder's perspective and they like still bounce ideas off of me once in a while. Um, but for the most part I'm not really involved in like advocacy work anymore... for my own sake and like for other people's perception of me. Because when they meet me, they think I'm going to be this like progressive... in your face democrat with like pins all over. And I'm not that person anymore, and so I really just like want - I don't want people to think of me like and accredit everything and all of me to like March for our Lives. Although... I'm really proud of the organization I don't want that to be everything that people think of me as, and I also don't want people to... assign me the role of... school shooting survivor and leave it at that, which a lot of people here do before they get to know me.

Hannah has had quite the journey from high school to college. She references her changed identity from involved and popular high school student to gun control advocate, to college student struggling to connect and identify her own identity. She experienced many common challenges of college transition including managing increased academic demands and building a new social network (Kroshus et al., 2021).

Most notably, she struggled with making friends in college and mourning the loss of her high school relationships. Previous studies found that students reported feeling isolated when transitioning to campus because they did not have anyone to talk to or receive support from in the initial adjustment period (Yazedjian et al., 2007). Hannah discussed feeling isolated because she had difficulty connecting to peers and did not have friends from home to lean on because she felt those friendships were strained. She also highlighted pre-established friend groups existing in college for students who grew up locally or had large groups of high school peers attend the

same college. Research reveals that students who did not have peers from high school with them in college, reported a lack of social connections (Yazedjian et al., 2007). Hannah experienced a lack of social connections because she only knew one person from high school going to college with her. Commonly, students lament friendship connections given up or strained in the process of transitioning to college and regard these disconnections as losses (Azmitia et al., 2013; Paul & Brier, 2001). Concern over losing connections from high school was heightened for Hannah as she processed her trauma. This included trauma from surviving a school shooting and losing friends because of her involvement with March for Our Lives.

Much of her experience was influenced by people around her encouraging her to seek work in politics and go to an Ivy League school. Now as a junior in college, Hannah has found her voice and is comfortable with her small circle of friends. She describes herself as an independent person who is happy to be alone sometimes. She's grateful for her friends in college, her boyfriend, and her friends from home who support her and allow her the time and space to process her experiences and emotions.

Veronica

Veronica is an 18-year-old college student at a prestigious private school in the Northeast. She was a freshman when the MSDHS shooting happened and reflected on how the event "shifted [her] entire world."

High School

As a freshman, she knew high school would be different, but she never expected how dramatically her experience would vary from her expectations. Everything from social experiences to safety and security were different after the shooting. She explained,

School was always like a safe place for me um prior to the shooting. And it's where I spent most of my time and most of my energy right like my main interest were like in my classes and doing well. But that after the shooting suddenly like that place was no longer safe for me like physically or mentally.

While she was struggling to cope with surviving a school shooting, everyone around her was also managing their emotions in different ways. Even teachers and administrators were struggling. The whole school and community was working through grief, which create another level of difficulty at school.

Um, because I tried to explain this to people that weren't there but - I feel like if you're in a school and let's say something traumatic happens to you and you're as an individual, you know, nobody else at your school deals with that - um you know, teachers and you know counselors are usually more lenient and like you've been through something traumatic. Whether it be losing your father your mother this or that and you know they give you some leniency but at Douglas because everyone went through it everyone was taking on to the same level and expected to do the same. Um so, I don't know be kind of it became this like judgment Olympics of like who had more trauma, and who's doing well, and who's not able to even function anymore. Um so that's kind of what it turned out to be like at Douglas and it just became like an extremely toxic environment. Kids were mean to each other, there is rampant like drug use that wasn't necessarily there before. Um because kids were just trying to escape you know, their lives and being at the school and everything else.

Veronica struggled with mental health and the difficult school environment but found purpose and comfort in advocacy work with March for Our Lives. As a co-founder, Veronica felt that she was making a difference through March for Our Lives but faced many of the same struggles as Hannah. Her peers criticized her involvement, accusing her of participating for recognition or “fame”.

March for Our Lives created a strange dichotomy of experience for Veronica. She explained that the classroom felt less meaningful when compared to her advocacy experiences.

...it's so hard to go from something like that [bus tour] to sitting in a classroom and staring at the clock. Like it's absolutely absurd because it's like for a summer we were literally making history like traveling the country and meeting with like people that we read about in textbooks, you know. Um and like celebrities that wanted to do like specific things to like you know, use the followings to help um the movement for gun control. But like we went from that to literally like having to read just textbooks about like American history and it was just bizarre. It felt so useless going to school, after that, because I learned so much more from being on tour and that kind of unconventional education that I did from in-person schooling.

It was her advocacy with March for Our Lives that inspired her to transfer schools. Veronica felt that MSDHS was a negative school environment and persuaded her parents to move to Washington D.C. so she could attend a school she spoke at during the March for Our Lives bus tour. She explained how different her experience was in the two schools,

Like I, I remember thinking like oh my God I didn't know kids can go to school and actually like enjoy it and be happy and they could actually like talk about these

progressive issues without like each other ripping each other's throats out... I started school in D.C. and it was the best experience of like my entire life. Like my high school in D.C. like completely changed my life... To go from such a bad situation to situation where like I felt so seen and like loved in like the community was there was so great, and I also understand like, the extreme privilege and being able to like my parents wanted to move anyways you know and, like, I had the option to move. Um and that's something I like I don't I when I left Douglas I kind of just left, like I told my closest friends right like... and I left because I couldn't handle you know any more vitriol from people around me being like oh, you're just leaving you're escaping like whatever. But like honestly, it was just about like survival for me at that point, like mentally um, and so I came to D.C., and I finished high school here. And it was absolutely wonderful, and I learned that like I could be happy and enjoy school again and I figured out like some of my major interests without... because I was so young, I feel like a lot of my interests ended up being about like you know guns and like, like specifically like gun reform politics, and all this stuff.

Veronica's experience was different from her peers in that she was able to leave the school within a year of the school shooting. She explained that many of her friends who created her support network at school had graduated in her sophomore year. A lack of safety both physically and mentally also played an important role in Veronica's departure. Creating a welcoming and safe school climate is necessary to provide a conducive learning environment and fear of school violence conflicts with these efforts (King & Bracy, 2019). Leaving MSDHS and finishing her schooling in a new more positive environment changed her whole high school experience and allowed her time to have traditional high school experiences before transitioning to college.

College Transition

Selecting colleges to apply for was a lengthy process for Veronica. She spent plenty of time weighing options and considering what she wanted in a university. Personal safety and gun laws were a factor in Veronica's college choice. She explained,

Um, of course, like my um, my main like premises were that I didn't want to go to school in the south, I didn't want to go to school in Florida um and... So that was like the main thing. And then also, I didn't want to go to school, somewhere, rural and I think a lot of that is tied to like Parkland was like pretty suburban/ rural in some places um and I just didn't want that I was like I need to be in a city or something anything that like distract me from that.

She went on to explain that gun laws in the South are so lax that she wanted to avoid schooling there. Knowing that there were stricter laws in the Northeast led her to look at campuses in that area. She explained that it was both a conscious decision and something that was second nature to her from her years of advocacy work. Veronica applied to a variety of prestigious schools including Harvard College, Georgetown University, Northwestern University, Columbia College, and Barnard College. She explained that she really wanted to go to Harvard and described romanticizing the institution and what it meant to be a Harvard student. She also felt that going to Harvard would validate the advocacy work she did that was ultimately questioned by her peers. She expounded,

Because it was like Oh My God, if only I can get there, you know, then it's like proving all of the kids that were mean to me all the kids that were mean to us that, like I worked hard, like in school, I was doing something that was valuable.

Ultimately, Veronica did not get accepted to Harvard College. She explained disappointment when she received the news but is ultimately happy at the school she currently attends. Through discussion with her therapist, she selected her college based on fit and personal reasons rather than others' perceptions of her advocacy work. She cites her therapist as a mentor during this time.

College choice and the transition to college can be a very stressful time that encourage feelings of self-doubt and loss (Paul & Brier, 2001). Strong mentorship and support from personal connections can make the process smoother for students (Longerbeam, 2016). Veronica praises her therapist for her assistance during the college decision and transition period.

One of the major things that changed in my life when I moved from Florida to D.C. is that I got a new therapist and she actually like, like I jive with her, you know. So, she changed my life, probably saved my life like multiple times, but like she was a big mentor. Not necessarily directly but just all the concerns I had about you know not getting into Harvard or you know, not knowing whether to like go to a different school or stay here for my [ill] father and all those stresses, is she really helped me out. My therapist helped me out with like literally everything, but specifically the college process, she really helped me feel more comfortable in it.

Veronica's therapist was a major support during her college transition time. She also credits relationships she made with a specific news reporter as helpful in her journey to college.

She's like an established journalist and she's been here for a while and like I just really clicked with her, she was literally probably the first person that ever interviewed me from like a national news network. Um and she lives in Virginia close to where I live, and she's

like super genuine like a lot of reporters are not. But she seems to actually care and like that meant a lot to me when I was younger and so she's like a great mentor of mine. Like just as like a woman in politics/journalism and you know she she's helped me a lot in the college process and, just like in general, just like your life and career wise.

Mentorship and support came in different forms for Veronica. She reflected on the summer before going to college and cited as the most influential time before her shift to college. While she expressed concern for challenges the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic posed for education and her college experience.

COVID-19. Much of Veronica's college transition, considerations, and concerns were shaded by the COVID-19 global pandemic. She explained a major area of concern was "concern that I would have to go back to school virtually or start college virtually." While this was a major area of concern for students across the nation, Veronica explains how a virtual school environment is seen through a specific lens of abnormality.

I don't know, I think I just wanted some sense of normalcy because so much of my high school was abnormal, obviously. Um so like going into college, you know I don't even care, I don't, I'm not expecting I don't want the whole John Hughes like girlfriend/boyfriend thing like whatever. I just wanted like bare minimum, I want in person classes, like a roommate to live on campus you know um, disgusting dining hall food like that's all I want. You know, like I wanted the bad stuff like that very average stuff. Um and so that's what I was hoping for. But with COVID I wasn't sure if I was going to get that right, like, I thought that there was a possibility that I would be living at home, another year.

COVID-19 posed challenges for Veronica as she navigated feelings of isolation and loss of a traditional high school experience. She explained,

Like going, finishing high school during COVID and being at home and isolated. It's also very difficult when dealing with like mental health because it wasn't until like I moved away from Florida that actually started processing some of my grief and some of my trauma.

During this time, Veronica was navigating a global pandemic, preparing for college, graduating high school, and tending to her mental health by working through trauma from surviving a school shooting.

Summer. As Veronica discussed, much of her life as a high school student was abnormal. She spent much of her time traveling, advocating for stricter gun laws, and going to townhall meetings. She never felt like she was having a normal high school experience. So, the summer before college Veronica explained, "I was just like hoping for some semblance of normalcy. Um and I was just honestly, trying to like have fun." Veronica explained that she desired a summer where she was exclusively enjoying time with friends and relaxing before entering the next chapter of her life.

Um so last summer, like a big part of it for myself was, I just wanted to have like a normal summer. Like, I just wanted to have a summer I didn't do anything. Um and so like, I just, I just did fun stuff. Like um, like I, with my brother, and like a couple of our friends, he started like a hiking club this summer. So, we did that, like we talked about random stuff like, of course, we would ever so often talk about politics, but like you just talked about our lives. Like, who we're dating, or who we're seeing, or who we're

interested in, or you know what's like our new interest like if we like this or that or what the books we're reading.

And it sounds funny but it's kind of like when like um elderly people, you know go into like elderly home whatever. And like, they start, just like hanging out together and like purposely doing structured activities to avoid from like talking about like their health issues or this or that like that's essentially what we were doing. And I mean it's kind of um symbolic in that like you know, even though we were 15,14,16,17,18 like year-olds, we were like doing like adult shit you know. So, it was kind of fitting that like in our healing process we're now at the point where like this summer, for us, was really just like kind of doing like structured activities that were specifically to distract us from like politics and all that we've been through together. Um and actually like learn about each other's interests beyond gun control um and politics, and it was just a great experience. So, hiking club was something that we did this summer. And also, partially because I wanted to distract myself from the stress of starting college.

Veronica described the importance of not carrying the weight of political work and reform and simply enjoying life. She looked for worry-free experiences like hiking club and learning to sail to occupy her mind and relieve the trauma of her past and the stress of going to college.

Moving-in. Moving to campus and transitioning out of one's family home can be a stressful and exciting time for college students (Kroshus et al., 2021). Veronica was no exception to these emotions. She explained having difficulty determining the difference between excitement and stress. She spent much of her time the summer before college distracting herself with various activities. "I kept telling myself, I was excited but maybe my body was so used to

like feeling the same chemical is that it was like this is stress.” Veronica’s stress from moving to school manifested itself in physical ways.

Like this is like a new thing for me it's kind of I think it's like a partially like a trauma response for like my stomach will just get in knots and like I'll be sick to my stomach... like the week before I started school. Even though I didn't feel consciously stressed, I was very excited.

Veronica sought medical treatment to no avail. There was nothing physically making her sick which is why she credits that experience to stress. She was determined to not allow her stomach issues dampen her excitement to meet her roommate and move into her residence hall. Veronica quickly identified some difficulties in meeting new people and how to share her story.

In the age of technology, students frequently share social media handles to create a connection and learn more about their peers (Youqin et al., 2019). Veronica quickly learned how this can be challenging for her. She described her experience,

My experience like meeting people in colleges like you know what's your name, what are you studying, this that and then, once you talk to them about where you're from and they're like okay like what's your Instagram, what's your snapchat? Like, stuff like that and that's kind of like the point where like it changes for me... I was like very deliberate with who I gave my Instagram to, you know. Even if I was making friends like I would just instead give them my snapchat because my snapchat is a public and like it doesn't have a verification checkmark or anything like that... Whenever like you meet someone new and you have like, I guess specifically for me, you know that I've been through mass shooting, there's like a certain moment where it's like, it goes from just being like normal

and like them wanting to know your name, where you're from to you know um, why do you have a verification on Instagram.

Veronica describes her experience as something similar to coming out for the LGBTQIA+ community. She would frequently go through the same litany of questions and comments from peers who would ask about her experience or express sorrow for her, so much that she actively worked to avoid those conversations until later in their friendship by sharing her snapchat first. Every time she met someone new, she explained, "I was trying to balance like who I told and who I didn't tell and what information I wanted to omit and what information I wanted to include." Veronica further explained the dissonance she felt between explaining her experiences and trying to hide it when meeting people.

Um, which is really hard because, like a lot of, like I want to be validated, you know for like my work and, like all everything I've done.... But at the same time, like I don't want to have to explain to every single new person that I meet at college um - Oh, you know I've been in a mass shooting, oh yeah, you know I've done this, I've done this, I've organized March for Our Lives, I did this and that. Because it's just exhausting. Like having to like re-tell your story over and over again just to try and get people to, I don't even know. Like it's, it's like you feel like you need to explain yourself like so often. And it's just a horrible process and that's something that I've like kind of gotten over. You know, I used to kind of feel bad when telling people when it came to that point and I like wanted to tell people um, or like specific people. But like, I no longer do necessarily. Like, I don't feel the pressure that I used to feel like I need to explain myself to every single person I meet when they ask me questions. And I also, something that's changed since starting college is, I don't feel I need to answer people's questions, you know. And

that's huge because it's like, I think it's about like dignity like self-respect um regarding my trauma. Like, I don't need to give everybody an answer for every single prodding question they have. And I can choose when I want to talk about stuff and when I do want to answer people. Um so it was definitely, it was super fun like coming to college, but you know as soon as it got past the where you're from and, of course, that I didn't lie, but like I either told them, I was from D.C. or I told them, I was from South Florida. You know never specifically "Oh, in Parkland" um because that would just get really complicated really fast.

Making friends at a new school can be daunting but Veronica experienced a higher level of stress while navigating how her peers would perceive her. Her college is very politically oriented with many students aspiring to political careers after college. Veronica explains that this culture gave her pause when making friends and wondering their motivations.

I always kind of felt like I was lying to people, which is really hard when you're trying to like build relationships with people. So, I wanted to see if these people like these, my classmates wanted to be my friends, because or my friend, because they like actually liked me and like hanging out with me and like my interests. Um or if they just wanted to be friends with me to use me as like a contact you know or connection because that's very, very prevalent [at my school]. Any semblance of like power related to politics, like kids will latch on and try and just like absorb, which is so toxic. But that's one of the reasons why like I didn't tell a lot of people because I didn't want people to become friends with me just because they think I have some connection to politics, you know. Which I do, but like it's not, I don't want people to become friends you just for that you know.

While transitioning to college and making new friends came with a unique set of challenges, Veronica is happy in college and enjoying her living situation and friends she has made in school.

College

Academics. As a first-year student, Veronica is undeclared and still considering her career and major options. She goes to, what she perceives as, a highly political college where engagement in politics is highly common. Government is a common area of study for students. Veronica attributes her experiences through high school to why she is not interested in majoring in Government.

I don't want to be a Gov major you know, like I care about politics deeply um but like I also kind of hate it. Like, I kind of hate politics now, and I, how do I say this like it's something that I have to deal with daily and like because of who I am and what I've been through and like what work I've done. But like, I like the aspect of creating social change that is like through art, you know through literature, through marketing, through - I don't know - things that feel more genuine than like governmental politics and like bureaucratic politics. Um and so, specifically that's why I know I like don't want to be a Gov major but I'm leaning towards like American studies and specifically like English and psychology. One of those three and also like I've been taking courses, where I might minor in justice and peace studies and obviously that's correlated to what I've been through, so.

While her experiences with March for Our Lives and surviving a school shooting are salient in her future goals and academic interests, Veronica is looking further into things that interest her

and are not directly tied to government and politics. Outside of her studies, Veronica is finding pleasure in co-curricular involvement.

Co-Curricular Involvement. Veronica has gotten involved on campus with co-curricular activities which has helped her make friends and create a sense of belonging at school. Because much of her life has been politically motivated, Veronica has limited the organizations she has joined tied to political goals. She is involved in an organization that advocates for woman's reproductive rights and abortion rights.

Um honestly like, I got involved in a few but because my life is so political outside of school, um I didn't want my entire like school identity to be surrounding politics, like for many kids at [my school] it is.... I also like more so I got involved with like organizations at the school that are like arts oriented. Um, like I started working for like this school arts magazine just because that's what brings me joy, you know. And like I said but, that's one way I can, I think I can like established political change and stuff like that is through like talking about art through talking about like trends in art. Whether it be this or that or political like art installations and that's what I'm like you know and so that's what I'm doing um, yeah.

She goes on to explain how involvement in these arts organizations has allowed her to meet like-minded people who have the same interests as she does. Involvement in the arts has been a focus for Veronica both as a political advocacy method and a way to escape the politics of her life. Advocacy has been a major role throughout her journey to college and now, Veronica has expanded her vision of what advocacy is.

Advocacy. Gun control advocacy has been a major element of Veronica's identity since surviving the school shooting. Now being in college, she has spent time reflecting on how advocacy will play a role in her college experience and future life.

I kind of got to this place where I realized that some of the best... advocating I can do - and this sounds really cheesy, but like honestly like for myself and it's not necessarily public, but like privately. Like some of the best, I think, like the greatest protest, like everything I went to, and I think the biggest "fuck you" to like gun violence mass shootings that I could possibly ever give isn't through like necessarily politics, which it would be lovely if they could actually pass gun laws - but it's through me actually living my life as a young person, you know and doing these like college student things and like hanging out with friends and like meeting new people, and you know starting like dating someone - those are the best possible things I can do to say like this like idiot who decided to like literally like murder people at my school tried to take this away from me and the other students... And in me just living my life and being a college student and prioritizing having fun and doing things with friends that's powerful and I don't think people give that enough recognition. I know I didn't used to. Um but that's where I got to, and so I think, I still think advo- like I'm an advocate in my daily life; it's just not in the same way as it used to be. Um, it's kind of in a different sense than it used to be.

But I also think like, it like, obviously because all this happened, like my developmental, like especially my developmental years like 14 to 18 and so all these little like aspects of like being an advocate and organizer and, like every single person I ever met and was interviewed by or like talk to, or was mentored by it all affected me deeply like in how I function, I was like a human psychologically. Um and how I treat other people, and so I

think not in like the normal sense of like every day going out to like protest this or that but this sense of like I know, like the importance of treating people kindly. I know the importance of like listening to someone, especially if they're young and like not being heard by people. I know the importance of like writing and the importance of art and the importance of going to therapy.

Um and that's honestly, all those things are embedded in me. Like not in the traditional sense of being an advocate, but in my own personal way that's just how I exist it's you know, unable to be taken out of who I am as a person in daily life.

Veronica recognizes that her experiences have led her to be an advocate in her daily life by showing that active shooters cannot take her future away. While not displayed in common ways like protests and lobbying, Veronica is a symbol for gun control advocacy and seeks to live her life in a way that exemplifies how society should treat one another, the importance of the arts, and care for mental health.

High school was difficult for survivors of the MSDHS shooting and influenced their outlook for the rest of high school and on to college. Veronica shared a very thoughtful overview of her experiences and decision making. In reflection of her experiences, Veronica shared a concluding thought. "It's really hard. Like I know that's not an eloquent way of putting it, but like it's really difficult to go through a shooting and then to even get into college, you know even make it through high school." Veronica explained that her transition to college gave her the opportunity to write her own story.

... now I have this like blank notebook and I'm able to have like the control of having the pen and like kind of recasting the character of myself and like who I am amongst like a

cool new scene of people that I didn't know before. And, of course, like I'm a flawed character like I've made mistakes transitioning to college and stuff like that, but the importance is that, like I'm in control of the pen you know, this time it's not being written for me like I am personally writing it.

While she endured trauma, college is now a time to be in control of her experiences though she's experienced difficult things that stay with her to this day.

Veronica experienced common challenges associated with transitioning to college which included building a new social network and navigating the increased autonomy of college life (Kroshus et al., 2021). Throughout her story she reframed her trauma as a coping method to understand her experiences. Her vision of advocacy has changed in a way that allows expression through art and enjoying life as a school shooting survivor. Research has found that trauma survivors who believe they can learn from their experiences or make positive meaning out of their situation tend to be more resilient (Banyard & Cantor, 2004). Veronica exemplified this through her narrative of advocacy through everyday living.

Ross

Ross is a 22-year-old International Service major at a private university in the Northeast region of North America. He was a Senior when the MSDHS shooting occurred in 2018 just four months before graduation. Ross was more guarded in his interview and less detailed in his storytelling than the other participants. He seemed less inclined to discuss emotions or details of support networks. Much of his story was focused on advocacy and negative experiences he has endured in college.

High School

Ross described himself as a student highly involved in the arts during high school. He founded the high school improv club and found joy in television production and acting as a student journalist. He also held a job outside of school, which kept him busy. Ross explained that his experience in high school arts inspired him to make his interest a career. He planned to attend the Columbia College of Arts in Chicago until the school shooting changed his trajectory. Ross shared,

Uh, and then, when the shooting happened. I was still set, trying to go to Chicago to study uh, at the Columbia College. That did not happen. Then uh, forged into a life of activism from the tragedy in my community and as a result I applied to different schools after a gap year that I took.

Activism became a cornerstone of Ross' life, and he took a year between high school and college to continue his activism work. He calls this his gap year. During his gap year, Ross described a call to action that led him to put college on hold. He traveled with March for Our Lives, explaining,

I'm dedicated to the mission. The work. And how do I define that? I define that as saving lives. I define that as being able to maneuver the resources necessary to prevent this violence and I think that that job will possibly never be done, but so long as I have a platform and I'm being listened to, I feel I ought to be saying things that could possibly help. And I know that certainly inadvertently uh, and as part of larger coalition actions things that I've supported have definitively saved lives, and I am forever thankful for the organizing and activities of those sorts of groups.

Feeling a call to action, he put his college experience on hold for a year. Later, he decided that education was important for his future career and decided to apply for college.

Ross did not have any safety considerations when applying for college, but he did have geographical requirements for his future school. He did not want to go to college in Florida, justifying,

I don't necessarily feel like living in Gainesville or Tallahassee or Tampa. I've lived in South Florida, enough of my life I don't need to move to another part of Florida. The world is too big for that. I wanted to be in a city. I applied to a lot of Chicago schools. Boston, New York, L.A., and I only really got in here.

Ross was limited by college choice by acceptance but was happy with the location of his university in a major city. With that, he accepted his admittance and made the move from Florida to his new home in college.

College Transition

Many students would say that transitioning to a new city and school is stressful or emotional (Paul & Brier, 2001). Ross felt that going to college was the next step in his journey and did not describe a difficult transition. He shared that his support network was immediate family during the transition to college. Ross noted,

I mean the, the transition period was just uh - I needed to go to school. I need to get an education. So, uh just, I went once I got accepted to ... University in the fall of 2019. Moved up here. Uh, yeah, I mean in terms of support just immediate family parents. and yeah. It really wasn't emotional like it wasn't like it was just the thing that I needed to do, and I was already delaying it so much.

Ross continued to maintain that he had no emotions during his transition to college. He described the time as a necessary step on the road to his future career. Ross shared that leaving behind work with March for Our Lives was more difficult than expected. He felt that his work with the organization was not valued, which created an impetus to leave.

Well, there was a difficulty, but it was more to do with the advocacy work that I was doing. Because I was a full-time employee for the March for Our Lives Action Fund at the time and because I had considered going to school, they had considered dropping me completely when I was still dedicated to the mission and the work and still am, to this day, despite many of the people who pushed back against me no longer being part of the organization. Uh, so that that was more of the tense nature there, it was that that was another reason that it pushed me to continue to just go to school. Because the organization really stopped treating me fairly or really engaging with me in a way that that I felt that I could continue to do the work that I needed to do without being impeded. So, I decided to take some more control of my own existence and go elsewhere.

Ross still supports the March for Our Lives movement and participates with the organization when asked. He continues to advocate for gun legislation and other causes he cares deeply about like Black Lives Matter. He continued,

I believe in ending gun violence in this country and whatever it is that can do that - if I see something that can help, even if it's just to bring awareness and advocate against the issue in a way, that that will actually draw eyes and change hearts and minds then I'll help out wherever I see fit.

Relationships. With advocacy being at the forefront of the end of high school and his gap year before college, friendships changed and evolved. Ross explained how his friendships changed when he left Florida and March for Our Lives for college.

With high school and everything that's a mixed bag because in just committing myself to advocacy that alienated myself from many friends. Uh because I believed in doing something, and people took that - because some individuals might have been looking for attention or fame or anything like that, but that was that couldn't be farther from the truth for my story.

For Ross, high school friendships changed as people questioned his intent and involvement in March for Our Lives. His March for Our Lives relationships were strained by peers questioning the work he was doing for the organization. He shared,

To be told that by them that I wasn't doing anything that they couldn't, they couldn't pinpoint what my value was that they basically considered me valueless. That, that was painful and especially after communicating with some of those people and having them go even further from the comments that I had heard was, was just awful.

Feeling that he dedicated his time and energy to March for Our Lives without recognition or appreciation, he knew it was time to leave the organization for college.

College

Academics. Ross attends a prestigious private university and studies International Service. Originally, he thought he would go to school for something more arts-based like journalism, film, or acting. He explained that he found his interest in this major through his experience in advocacy work.

My major is international service, which is a funny way to say foreign relations. I am focusing in on Latin America with human rights and foreign policy being the center focus of that. I chose that through my experience and advocacy. I had traveled to multiple countries. I had met with many people of all ages across this planet, and I wanted to continue to commit myself to cultural exchange, in some way, shape or form and if I could get paid doing it that'd be awesome.

Travel, human rights, and advocacy remain central to his interests, so he has found a major that fulfills his future career goals.

Relationships. Making friends in a new community is a major part of the transition to college. Ross, like many others, described challenges finding the right friends for him. Being from Parkland, Florida presented unique challenges.

Making friends was certainly quite difficult. I would continue to put myself out there and met maybe like a dozen people that I could consider friends.... And some people are outright offensive and don't care and, and those are the worst people in my opinion. I mean, to the point where it's if I'm uncomfortable in a situation, I will not say I'm from Parkland I will say I'm from South Florida, and if they say what part, I will say Coral Springs or Boca Raton.

I will intentionally leave out certain details if I'm telling a story that might involve some of that work like I'm saying I will leave out key details of it to just make it the fun story that I'm trying to tell as opposed to bringing in all of that energy. Because the I, I mean it's, it's a mix of the people who will pity you, the people who will who envy you, the

people who uh yeah just really those, those individuals uh are the major examples that come to mind when, when I when I think about those types of interactions.

Navigating conversations with new people was a challenge for Ross since he felt the need to edit his story or experience to avoid conversation and comments about the shooting. Ross found that his peers would not know how to react or would react in ways that made him uncomfortable. He continued,

Because I have quite a unique life experience it becomes very difficult for individuals to relate with on, on the same page... I think that's part of it. I think it's, it's also uh - It is where I will be open and honest about my experiences and some people find that to be too intense. Where it's like this is just my life man, I can't change that for you and I'm not going to.

Finding friends was a challenge with his background and experiences. In an effort to continue making friends, Ross joined a few co-curricular organizations to meet friends but was faced with new challenges when the COVID-19 global pandemic happened.

COVID-19. When COVID-19 began, Ross was traveling internationally over his spring break. Ross was in London, England when his trip was cut short, and he flew home to Florida. He missed going to Switzerland for advocacy work that was moved to a virtual platform. Ross blames the pandemic for lack of connection with faculty and staff at the university. He also explains that co-curricular involvement was less enjoyable in a virtual format.

Again pandemic. Incredibly difficult. Like to, to the point where meetings on Zoom made no sense. Because no one would have their camera on; no one would talk. Why am I there? That, that's not cheese club. it's not. It's not astronomy. Like what? This, this year

I'm in a few, but everything is still very inconsistent. And there's a rule on campus in which you can only plan events, you have to have a five-week advance notice. So, if you want to have people at an event, and not just do a Zoom room, you have to tell them five weeks in advance. And they told us that, at the beginning of the semester. Virtually telling us that for the first five weeks we can't do anything.... And it like the lack of extracurriculars also caused the inability to meet with people.

Ross explained that the pandemic made it hard to connect with others. He continued to live in an apartment by campus through the pandemic and was faced with the same college challenges he experienced before the pandemic.

Mental Health. College can be stressful for students. Common stressors for college students include loss of previous social support networks, increased academic pressures, pressure to create new peer relationships, and increases in personal responsibility including housing and money management (Vaez & LaFlamme, 2008; Voelker, 2003). The common stressors of college compounded with Ross's history of school shooting trauma made mental health support imperative for his college success. Finding appropriate mental health resources and support was a major challenge for Ross in college.

It was a little difficult, given that I had sought out therapy from, from the school and that's a - it's, it's terrible. It's beyond terrible it re-traumatizes me almost every single time I go there. But I had to go there for a significant amount of time because I could not afford any therapeutic services.

He explained being dissatisfied with the mental health services at his university and the experiences he had with counselors. He struggled to find affordable and appropriate mental health services.

An additional challenge Ross highlighted was trauma related to fire alarms. He shared that the frequency of fire alarms would affect his school performance.

Well, one thing is that something is quite triggering to me because of the shooting is fire alarms. Especially when they're going off just any just anytime a day. Especially the middle of the night, without warning. And that happened a lot in the freshman dorms... it's stupid stuff like that, but that would throw off my entire day if it happened twice in a week that throws off my entire week. And I will become incredibly difficult to go to class. To keep up with my schooling. And when I communicate this with professors, they would be to a varying degree of understanding.

As I said, there have been some who have out right rejected my reasoning and there are others who have been fully - fully supportive, to the point where they're like yeah you don't have shown up all week just rest, just stay alive

These are challenges that affect Ross deeply in his higher education journey. He has had varying levels of support from faculty when navigating mental health challenges and post-traumatic stress from the shooting. Studies show that students connect institutional support to the existence of supportive relationships with staff, faculty, and advisors (Yazedjian et al., 2007). Ross cited a faculty member who was supportive during his times of stress and how she made a difference in his experience.

Ross highlights mostly negative experiences in his narrative. Baynard and Cantor (2004) found that students who have experienced trauma in their lives may have a negative transition and experience in college. This negative experience is typically marked by less resiliency if they perceive lower levels of social support or lower attachment to friends and parents. When Ross left for college, he described feeling undervalued and betrayed by friends in March for Our Lives. In his story, there are signs of difficulty resulting from his trauma and feeling no support from some faculty, staff, friends, and college community members.

Ultimately, Ross sees his degree as necessary to provide “legitimacy” to the work he is currently doing. The role of advocate is the most salient identity marker in his story. Linder et al. (2019) explained that some students feel a responsibility to engage in activism. This can sometimes result in investing all of their energy into advocacy work at the detriment to their academic performance, co-curricular involvement, and social experiences (Linder et al., 2019). This may explain Ross’s narrative and his focus on advocacy work above all else.

This chapter narrated the stories of Hannah, Veronica, and Ross as they shared their perceptions, challenges, and joy in the transition to college. Their stories were told in long narrative segments to fully convey their experiences. In the next chapter their narratives are examined through the lens of Schlossberg’s transition theory and existing literature.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Limitations, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the narratives of how students have been influenced by their experience surviving the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting. Specifically, this study examined their transition to and experiences in higher education through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory.

Veronica a freshman, Hannah a junior, and Ross a senior during the shooting shared their stories of surviving the school shooting, completing high school, and going to college. All three participants shared their experiences as student advocates and their changing identities as they navigated the transition to college. The data collected through these three participants' interviews were analyzed to answer the following research questions:

- How has surviving the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School shooting influenced student survivors in their transition from high school to college?
- How do MSDHS shooting survivors explain their college experiences?

A narrative inquiry methodology allowed participants to share stories that exemplify their experiences of transition which highlighted incidents of value and turmoil. These stories demonstrated the ways students navigated perceptions of their peers, mental health, their role of advocacy, and finding their place in a new college community.

Stories serve as a portal by which people understand their experiences and interpret what is personally meaningful in their lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Using a narrative lens allows a deep understanding of how experiencing and surviving the school shooting influences participants' life stories across different contexts. Through storytelling Veronica, Hannah, and Ross highlight the different transitions they experienced. Temporality, sociality, and place

provided a conceptual framework through which to examine their stories. The meaning and value of their stories are guided by these elements.

Research Question One – Transition

How has surviving the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School shooting influenced student survivors in their transition from high school to college?

Surviving the MSDHS shooting influenced participants' transitions from high school to college in a variety of ways. This section will explore the influence of surviving a school shooting using Schlossberg's Transition Theory as a framework for understanding. Schlossberg's transition theory "provides insights into factors related to the transition, the individual, and the environment that are likely to determine the degree of impact a given transition will have at a particular time" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 213). Experiencing and surviving the MSDHS shooting had a different influence over each student and their transition to college, which Schlossberg's theory seeks to explain. Narratives have been examined to highlight emergence of Schlossberg's four S's (Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies for Coping). Following, areas of influence that are not explained through the framework will be discussed.

Common themes that emerged in each participant's narrative include high school environment post shooting event, college choice, building relationships in college, and support networks. Participants shared how these experiences were influenced by surviving a school shooting and their involvement in March for Our Lives.

Situation Factors

Going to college was an anticipated transition for all three participants. However, their expectations and plans for college changed after the school shooting. Schlossberg's situation factors will provide context and deeper understanding of each narrative. Situation factors account

for the transition trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, experience with a previous transition, concurrent stress, and assessment. Specifically, timing, control, role change, and concurrent stress provide deeper understanding of participant stories.

Timing. Timing was an expected factor that would influence each participant differently. Ross was a senior, Hannah was a junior, and Veronica was a freshman in high school when the school shooting occurred. All three participants were co-founders of the March for Our Lives organization which was heavily active immediately after the shooting event. After the shooting, Ross had about four months left in high school. He made the decision to delay his college attendance by a year because he felt that his work with March for Our Lives was not complete. Hannah, as a junior, had over a year left in high school but struggled with the changed high school environment. Though academically excelling, she focused on March for Our Lives work and did not give much time or consideration to her college selection or transition. The timing of her transition was important because she described a whirlwind of advocacy work which kept her busy and able to avoid processing her trauma. Lastly, Veronica as a freshman had almost her entire high school experience ahead of her. She had plenty of time to consider colleges and make a thoughtful transition to college.

Timing was an important factor to all the participants, but perhaps most significant in Hannah's narrative. Transitioning to college came shortly after her time traveling with March for Our Lives and during the height of her feeling the loss of her friendships. Had the timing been different, her mentor may have been less connected and influential over her college applications and her college choice may have changed. Ross taking a gap year is a significant element of his story that influenced his college trajectory. Prior to the shooting, he planned to study film and go to school in Chicago. After surviving the school shooting, the timing of his high school

graduation, and his gap year working with March for Our Lives influenced his college choice and major. Veronica described more consideration for options and thoughtful dialogue around college choice and major, where Hannah and Ross described less thought and quicker decision making. Veronica had the luxury of time to have experiences with advocacy work, meeting students around the country touched by gun violence, and transferring to a new high school. She had more time to make decisions, which influenced her transition to college.

Control. Ross, Hannah, and Veronica all described control as an influential factor in their transition. Schlossberg considers what elements of the transition participants perceive to be within their control, specifically, controlling how their peers would perceive them. All three participants shared stories of meeting new people when they got to college and trying to control where the conversation would lead. They each explained being vague about their hometown to not alert their peers to the Parkland shooting. Ross explained editing stories to not be specific to Parkland or March for Our Lives to control where the conversation would lead, while Veronica and Hannah were careful about who they connected with on social media to avoid questions about their verified public figure accounts. Control over how they would be perceived by peers and how introductory conversations would go was top of mind because of the school shooting experience.

Another, less prominent, area of control for all participants was controlling the geographical location of their institution of higher education. Each of them discussed a desire to leave Florida for a fresh start somewhere else. All three chose states in the Northeast region of the United States, citing stricter gun laws as a main reason. Each of them discussed a strong desire to leave Florida with Hannah explicitly tying that decision to the school shooting.

Role change. This factor was distinctly prominent for all three participants. They each transitioned from active roles in March for Our Lives which was a significant identity factor. They all viewed themselves as advocates who dedicated significant time and effort to fighting for gun control legislation. Hannah referred to herself as a public figure, both within her high school and on a national level. For each of them, advocate is still an element of their identity; however, advocating with March for Our Lives transitioned from their primary role to something they all stepped back from. Entering college, they viewed their primary role to be student. This shift was difficult for each participant for different reasons.

Hannah struggled to make friends in college. She attributes this difficulty to trauma experienced in high school in two ways – first surviving a school shooting, and second, the evolution of her relationships and how her peers perceived her motivation for advocacy work. Much of Hannah’s narrative focused on her struggle to make connections with peers at her new institution. Her role had changed from advocate working for a cause to student on a level playing field with peers who she perceived had not experienced the same trauma. Additionally, she doubted her academic abilities at a rigorous college, which made her question her status as a student who deserved to be there. Hannah recognized the repercussions of abandoning her academics for advocacy in high school, causing her to struggle at the collegiate level. Ross had similar difficulty relating to peers but mainly focused on his advocacy work. He displayed a desire to be viewed as an advocate, stating that he was only going to college to get a degree to validate the advocacy work he was already doing. Of the three, Veronica seemed to struggle the least with her role change. She was ready to have a “normal” college experience after an abnormal high school experience and weathering the challenges of COVID-19.

Duration. The duration of the transition from high school to college was unique for each participant. Ross lengthened the duration of his transition to college by an entire year. As a senior, he would have transitioned to college months after the shooting took place. However, he chose to stay in Florida and work full-time for March for Our Lives. During the duration of his transition, he described fulfillment through advocacy work but turmoil with peers and feelings of being undervalued by March for Our Lives. Hannah described a difficult transition, which caused her to question how long the transition would last. She struggled to connect with peers and questioned her academic qualifications at an Ivy League college. The difficulty finding peers she could connect with and trust, paired with stressors of college life, made for a longer transition for Hannah. She described a transition lasting over a year until she felt at peace with her new surroundings and peer group. Lastly, Veronica described a shorter duration of transition. At the time of her interviews, she was in her second semester at college and felt settled and acclimated to campus. The duration of her transition was much shorter than Hannah's and Ross's and was described as a smoother experience. This is likely due to the time that had passed after the school shooting. Veronica had more time to process her experiences, do advocacy work, transition to a new high school, and find joy outside of advocacy which had enveloped her identity. Experiencing a transition to a new school and environment in high school likely prepared Veronica for the college transition.

Experience with a previous transition. Veronica, Hannah, and Ross all described a transition in their high school environment, roles and relationships following the school shooting event. The shooting was an unanticipated event that triggered a significant transition for each participant altering their daily lives. They experienced a change in situational factors like a loss of control, a role change as advocates, and concurrent stress from the trauma and grieving. Self,

support, and strategy for coping factors of Schlossberg's theory all presented themselves in discussion of mental health services and support networks of friends and teachers. Each participant had different experiences in each of the four S factors but described a perceived transition after the shooting.

Veronica described that school was previously a safe space that was no longer safe after the shooting. Veronica highlighted people using different strategies to cope with the trauma and loss. She sought therapy outside of the school district to process the experience. She described her peers taking other routes to cope, like drugs and alcohol. She said, "Douglas...just became an extremely toxic environment. Kids were mean to each other, there is rampant like drug use that wasn't necessarily there before... kids were just trying to escape their lives and being at the school and everything else." Previous research shows that alcohol may be a way to cope with emotional distress, and lead to possible temporary relief; however, that course of action is concerning, "as individuals who drink alcohol to cope with distress have been shown to experience more negative consequences than those who do not engage in alcohol use to cope" (Siebert et al., 2018, p. 189).

Like Veronica, Hannah described a change in her school experience after the shooting occurred. Hannah narrated a departure from the care-free person she was before the shooting to her new role as advocate. She expressed a situation factor, role change both in how she saw herself and how her schoolmates perceived her. Before the shooting, Hannah was very well liked by her peers, involved in school activities, academically advanced, and a student leader. After the shooting, much of her time went to March for Our Lives and she began to feel isolated from her friends. She found herself avoiding school both because of the trauma of the shooting and because of how her friendships and support networks disappeared due to her involvement with

March for Our Lives. Research has shown that trauma-exposed students frequently report higher rates of functional impairment, including decreased engagement in school and work, difficulties with activities of daily living, and disengagement of personal relationships or other social pursuits (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2013; Im et al., 2020). Hannah's role change after the school shooting may be explained by experienced trauma and inability to focus on school and friends the way she had prior to the school shooting.

Ross was a senior when the shooting occurred and recounted a transition that was different from what Hannah and Veronica described. He, like Hannah, experienced a notable role change from involved student to advocate swiftly following the shooting. He, like the other participants, noted that friends and peers in school questioned his reason for being involved in March for Our Lives. Some friends and peers questioned if he was participating for recognition or fame. He explains his role change to advocate as a permanent change that has become a significant part of his identity. All three participants experienced a role change from student to advocate quickly after the school shooting. This role change was a significant transition that influenced their relationships and academic focus. Previous research has looked at how the role of advocate can influence the student experience. Linder et al. (2019) spoke with student activists from minoritized populations about their experiences in college as a student and activist and found activism can take a toll on students as they continually fight for their vantage point. Some students feel a responsibility to engage in activism, which results in them "forgoing the luxury of merely being a student and being able to invest most of their energy in academic, creative, and co-curricular activities that earn them cultural capital in college and beyond" (Linder et al., 2019, p. 47). Though this study focused on college students, the results are congruent with the story Hannah, Veronica, and Ross share. They sacrificed co-curricular

involvement, presence in high school, and friendships to participate and travel with March for Our Lives, which resulted in a significant transition in their high school experience.

Each participant shared their perception of transition and change in their high school experience following the school shooting. However, Veronica's experience was different from her peers in that she was able to leave the school within a year of the school shooting. She explained that many of her friends who created her support network at school had graduated in her sophomore year. Additionally, she described Marjory Stoneman Douglass as a toxic environment that influenced her mental health. Studies show that experiencing trauma may contribute to feelings of loneliness when compared to students who have not survived trauma (Zeligman et al., 2019). Veronica described the feeling of loneliness after her friends in March for Our Lives had graduated and gone to college. Leaving MSDHS and finishing her schooling in a new, more positive environment, changed her whole high school experience and allowed her time to have traditional high school experiences before transitioning to college. While her environment changed, moving schools was not defined as a transition by Veronica. She explained it as a positive change that she was comfortable and familiar with because of her visits doing advocacy work with March for Our Lives. By leaving, Veronica was able to stabilize her transition and move into the taking charge phase of Schlossberg's transition theory before beginning her next transition to college.

Surviving the MSDHS shooting served as a previous transition that all three participants experienced before their individual transition to college. Though the transition experienced in high school was significantly different from their college transition, the influence of their high school experience was apparent as they discussed their college transition. Coping strategies learned through work with mental health professionals was evident in the narratives of Hannah

and Veronica. Additionally, trauma from high school relationships seemed to influence each participant's ability to connect with peers in higher education.

Concurrent stress. The last situation factor present in the narratives of Veronica, Hannah, and Ross is concurrent stress. This situation factor considers other sources of stress during the time of transition. This situation factor was the most unique for each participant. Though they all struggled with concurrent stress, each had different stressors during the time of their transitions.

Veronica had the most recent college transition, which was the furthest from the date of the school shooting event. She shared concurrent stress in her life during the college decision making process. Her father was very ill with a long-term degenerative disease that was influencing her decision-making process. She struggled to decide if she should stay close to home to see her parents more or go further from home for more independence in college. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic was a source of concurrent stress during Veronica's transition to college. She feared the pandemic would alter her first year of college. She described a desire for a "normal college experience" which all changed based on the pandemic and a possible need for virtual learning.

Hannah outlined concurrent stress from losing friends over their perception of her advocacy work. Her changing friendships and criticism from peers were main stressors during her last year in high school. She created a new group of friends through March for Our Lives and found her former friends questioning her intentions with advocacy work. Her peers questioning her intentions and accusing her of seeking fame caused emotional turmoil that she processed with the help of a mental health professional. She felt that her support network was gone, and she described grieving over the loss of friendships and support as she began her transition to college.

She said she was able to avoid processing the trauma of the school shooting until seeking therapy months before college. Processing trauma of the shooting and losing friends were significant areas of concurrent stress during her transition to college.

Lastly, Ross described concurrent stress he experienced from his departure from March for Our Lives. He detailed how members of March for Our Lives questioned what he was doing and made him feel that his work was not valued by the organization. This was a significant area of stress that ultimately influenced his decision to go to college.

Concurrent stress was present in each of the participant narratives in different capacities. Ross struggled with how peers perceived his work in March for Our Lives and feelings of being undervalued in the advocacy work he did. Hannah's stressors were much more focused on relationships and processing trauma than the other participants described. Veronica had a unique stressor as she transitioned during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their narratives converged to describe being challenged by outside stress compounded with the pressures of making new friends, moving to a new campus, and performing academically.

Summary. Situational factors described by Schlossberg's transition theory played a significant role in each participant's transition to college. Specifically, timing, control, role change, duration, experience with a previous transition, and concurrent stress were significant factors in their stories. Though each participant had different experiences, the experience of transition after surviving the school shooting influenced their transitions to college. Role change was another significant area in which all three participants had similar experiences. Timing, control, and concurrent stress had elements of similarity and divergence in each participant's transition. Perhaps the most striking of the four S's in participant transition to college is their sense of self.

Sense of Self

The second S in Schlossberg's theory considers the individual's sense of self. This area includes two categories: personal (or demographic) characteristics and psychological resources. Personal and demographic characteristics affect how an individual views life while psychological resources aid in coping and include ego development, outlook, and commitment and values (Evans et al., 2010). Both personal and psychological elements of self were significant elements of transition. This was an expected result of the school shooting; however, the extent that sense of self influenced participant transition was substantial. This can be explained by the high-profile nature of advocacy work with March for Our Lives.

Personal sense of self. Each participant shared how they were hesitant to announce their hometown or the name of their high school for fear it would trigger discussions of their trauma. They each detailed how they would introduce themselves to others, always being ambiguous about what area of Florida they hailed from. Veronica explained, "I was trying to balance like who I told and who I didn't tell and what information I wanted to omit and what information I wanted to include." Uniquely, Veronica feared that people would befriend her to further their political aspirations. She explained that students at her college are very politically oriented, and she worried that they would only seek friendships with her to make connections that could bolster a future political career. Ross felt he needed to edit his story to make his peers feel more comfortable. He also explained intentionally leaving out details of a story so that his peers would enjoy it without going into specific details of his trauma. Hannah struggled with her identity because of how her peers perceived her status as a public figure. She described challenges connecting with peers without being put on a pedestal for her advocacy work. All three masked elements of their identities to make connections with peers. Their sense of self was challenged in

the transition by trying to navigate how to share their identity, story, and background in a relatable way.

Navigating the process of making friends was complicated by their experience in high school. Each participant masked parts of their identity to avoid revisiting their trauma as they met new people. Veronica explained the process of making friends for a school shooting survivor in college, being like coming out for an LGBTQIA+ person, which is also how she identifies. Continually explaining her story to each new person she met was exhausting, and she found herself worrying about how her story would affect the person hearing it.

Hannah anticipated difficulty acclimating to college, so she enrolled in a pre-orientation program that targeted low income and first-generation students. Though she does not identify as a low income or first-generation student, she sought extra time to acclimate to college and make connections before classes began. Her sense of self and identity factors became a major roadblock to connecting with peers in the program. She felt it was difficult making friends in the program because she did not have many shared experiences with other program participants.

Outside of being a school shooting survivor, Ross identified himself as an advocate first, which changed his college trajectory. After his experiences with March for Our Lives, Ross identified himself as an advocate which he described being the most important element of his college transition and experience. This identity factor led him to find a school with a strong international relations program due to his interests in global advocacy work.

Social Media. Technology was described as a major element that challenged Veronica's and Hannah's ability to make connections. Having a blue verification checkmark on Twitter and Instagram identified them as public figures. Both described this element of their identity to be a challenge when making friends. Hannah explained that being a public figure verified on social

media created challenges of having authentic conversations and relationships with peers. She described peers asking why she has a verified public figure account without checking her pictures to discover why. This led to her reliving trauma and being asked uncomfortable questions about the shooting. Veronica intentionally decided who to connect with on Instagram and tried to make most connections on snapchat because the platform did not include verification or an influence of her experience as a school shooting survivor or March for Our Lives co-founder. Being a school shooting survivor and advocate is part of Hannah's and Veronica's identities; however, they looked for ways to make it an element of identity, or completely mask this area of identity, rather than a central factor when meeting new people.

Ross, though also being verified on social media as a public figure, did not verbalize the same challenges as Hannah and Veronica. This could be because he wanted advocacy work to be a main element of his identity. Being identified as a public figure through social media validated his role and identity as an advocate. Each participant wanted their peers to perceive them based on whatever identity factors were most significant individually. While they all navigated how peers would question their identity and experience as a school shooting survivor similarly, they navigated their identities as advocates and public figures differently based on how they wanted to be perceived.

Psychological sense of self. Psychological resources and support were major themes that weaved throughout Veronica, Hannah, and Ross's transition narratives. Interestingly, Veronica and Hannah displayed evidence of processing their experiences with a therapist. They both credited therapy with helping them process their emotions and ease their transition. Veronica credits therapy for teaching her to not feel responsible for other people's feelings or reactions to her experiences when sharing her story. Veronica also credited her therapist as a mentor during

her college selection and transition process. She was able to discuss fears and possibilities with an impartial person, which helped her transition. Lastly, she noted that therapeutic services were better outside of Florida. She described having better rapport with her therapist when she switched high schools. Hannah explained that she only began processing trauma from high school months before transitioning to college. She detailed the importance of therapy and how she was able to process her experiences. Both women shared their stories in a way that displayed thoughtful reflection and discussion with a therapist.

Ross did not seem to have the same access to substantial mental health resources. He detailed challenges in finding appropriate therapeutic services both in Florida and in college. In Florida, he felt that the counseling center he was referred to did not want to work with him because they focused on treating teachers from the school. Ross said he was not worth their time. He described being retraumatized by therapists in college based on retelling his story and starting over repeatedly. Ross's struggle to find appropriate mental health support may be why he was less open about his feelings and experiences. He frequently resorted back to his role as an advocate as the catalyst for all choices rather than reflecting on his experiences.

Sense of self played a major role in each participant's transition both in reflection of personal identity and psychological well-being. Psychological sense of self and well-being was expected to play a major role in participant transition based on Schlossberg's theory and trauma of their high school experience. Surviving a school shooting and being a well-known gun control advocate influenced their sense of self and identity in ways that were not expected prior to this study. Each participant spent significant time detailing the process of managing elements of their identity (specifically hometown and their advocacy roles) when meeting new people. Sense of self became a major element of Veronica, Hannah, and Ross's transitions to college.

Support

Schlossberg highlighted support as a significant factor in transition. The transition theory considers four types of support, including: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions/communities. Before collecting data, this study posited that deep and meaningful support networks in the high school and community likely developed after the MSDHS shooting event. After the interviews, this expectation was partially met.

Veronica described support networks changing in the high school. She described teachers, administrators, and school counselors as support networks prior to the school shooting. However, the school staff was also coping with loss and trauma and less able to support students during the aftermath. She explained that this was part of her reason for leaving the high school. During her transition to college, she highlighted the importance of support of friends and her therapist. Veronica shared the summer hiking club and activities she had right before college with admiration. This group of friends provided the warmth and support Veronica needed to prepare for her transition. Her desire for normalcy after a unique high school experience was being fulfilled through outdoor exploration with people who had similar experiences as she did. Though the high school environment and overall community were not supportive places for Veronica, she made connections with friends who shared the same trauma and could relate at that level. Her therapist supported the exploration of college options and processing her feelings. Veronica even considers her therapist a mentor in her transition.

Hannah expressed the gravity of losing friends and support networks when she went to college. Though she noted family being a strong support, she said that this was the time that she really began grieving the friendships she lost over her choice to participate in March for Our Lives. She felt she could not relate to peers who never experienced the same trauma she had. She

credits two friends from high school as major supporters during her transition. Hannah also explains that her parents were a strong support network for her as she explored options for college. She said they believed she deserved the best and allowed her the autonomy to grow and make choices. Additionally, Hannah attributes her attendance at an Ivy League school to her mentor helping her believe it was possible. Someone who came into her life during the March for Our Lives rallies became a support for Hannah when she applied to schools and still periodically checks in on her. Lastly, Hannah shared that her boyfriend was a major support for her in her first year of college. She felt that he could understand her even without experiencing the same level of trauma, which she values in the relationship.

Ross only cited immediate family as a support network in his transition to college. None of the participants talked about faculty or staff as a major area of support. Ross discussed a specific faculty member who gave him grace when experiencing psychological trauma. The faculty member gave him space to manage his trauma and still complete classwork without it influencing his grades. However, it is notable that none of the participants credited college personnel as influential or supportive during their transition. Each participant shared family as a support. Hannah and Veronica considered friends from home, mental health professionals, and professional staff from March for Our Lives as additional support.

Strategies for Coping

Strategies for coping is the final S in Schlossberg's transition theory. This explores coping approaches that people employ to ease a transition. Schlossberg highlighted four coping modes, including: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior. Hannah and Veronica used therapy as a strategy for coping with their transition. Shortly before going to college, Hannah began intensive therapy to begin coping with her high

school experiences and the grief she was experiencing. She noted the importance of the therapeutic work she was doing to help prepare her for the transition. She also cited the direct action of making connections with her boyfriend and roommate to cope with her transition. They were instrumental in her feeling comfortable in college.

Veronica explained, “I know the importance of treating people kindly... the importance of... listening to someone, especially if they're young and... not being heard by people. I know the importance of... writing and the importance of art and... of going to therapy.” Veronica was explaining her role as an advocate through action in the stated ways. However, this is also how she coped with her transition to college. She sought experiences that would bring her joy and valued therapeutic services.

Ross took his own approach to coping strategies. He seemed to use advocacy to direct conversation about his transition from high school to college. Continually, he avoided conversation about his emotions by conveying a very matter-of-fact transition that was necessary for a future career in advocacy work. However, he is open about seeking mental health counseling and the difficulty he had receiving effective services. He seemed to use direct action to cope with the emotions of the tragedy he experienced and the transition period that followed.

Veronica, Hannah, and Ross each shared how surviving the MSDHS shooting influenced their transition to college. Schlossberg’s transition theory serves as a framework to better understand their experiences and coping techniques. Their stories illustrate difficulty making connections in college due to their high school experience, the importance of support networks, and how imperative mental health support is for these students. While much of their experience can be understood through the lens of Schlossberg’s transition theory, there are elements of participant stories that are not explained by the theory.

What Schlossberg's Transition Theory Fails to Explain

Transitions are unique for each person depending on the factors described in Schlossberg's theory. Participants of this study also described experiences and factors that are not best understood through the transition theory. For deeper understanding, we look to existing literature in two specific areas: (1) Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and (2) concealing elements of one's identity. Each of these elements appeared throughout participant narratives but are not fully understood using Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Participants in this study have experienced a traumatic event before college that influences the way they function in the world. Previous studies have found that trauma-exposed undergraduate students frequently report higher rates of functional impairment, including decreased engagement in school and work, difficulties with activities of daily living, and disengagement of personal relationships or other social pursuits (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2013; Im et al., 2020). For those who have been diagnosed with PTSD, the diagnosis indicates substantial impact on a survivor's daily life in which a traumatic event(s) overwhelms their ability to cope in relation to the trauma (Shalka & Leal, 2022).

Ross was very open about his struggles with mental health because of the trauma he has endured. He described difficulty making friends because his peers do not know how to react to his trauma and disinterest in participating in social events or parties. He also detailed experiencing a significant mental health crisis in college and feeling unsupported by the institution. Much of his narrative focused on anger or dissatisfaction with his experiences and the response of mental health professionals, university staff, and law enforcement. Based on previous research, Ross's tendency to isolate, difficulty relating to peers, lack of belonging on campus, and anger/dissatisfaction might be explained by PTSD, depression, anxiety, or a variety

of other mental health challenges (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2013; Im et al., 2020; Shalka & Leal, 2022).

Hannah self-disclosed difficulty in her transition from her PTSD. She detailed, “I’ve talked to therapists about this... because PTSD causes... a lot of anxiety and depression. It makes it hard to want to do anything... PTSD makes you feel different from everyone around you.” Shalka and Leal (2022) found that students with PTSD had difficulty relating to peers and had a lower sense of belonging on campus than their peers who were not diagnosed with PTSD. This may explain Hannah’s difficulty to make connections or feel like she belonged on campus. She illustrates feelings of difference based on her trauma which she clearly ties to PTSD and is consistent with previous research.

Of the three participants, Veronica displays the least difficulty with PTSD and her transition to college. She detailed success making friends and getting involved on campus. There are no signs of PTSD influencing her transition. This is likely due to access to mental health services which she described as an important element of support during her transition to college. Each participant described different levels of mental health support and types of therapy approaches which may account for difference in mental health along with different experiences during the actual school shooting event.

Concealing Identity. Schlossberg’s transition theory explained how participants sense of self played a role in their transition to college. However, the theory was insufficient in explaining participants’ concealment of their identity related to the school shooting. All three participants shared that they concealed elements of their identity including their hometown, where they attended high school, their involvement in March for Our Lives, and their experienced trauma to avoid uncomfortable conversations. Veronica elucidated, “I was trying to balance like who I told

and who I didn't tell and what information I wanted to omit and what information I wanted to include.” Researchers have studied the challenges of managing an invisible stigmatized identity and the tension it creates during social interactions. A litany of questions arises as one concealing an identity interacts with others like, “to display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where” (Goffman, 1974, p. 42).

Previous studies have examined the effects of concealing identity factors when meeting new people. They have found that people with concealable stigmas, such as mental illness or sexual orientation, have the ability to hide the identity, “passing as one of the favored in-groups and avoiding the negative consequences of being part of the out-group” (Berkley et al., 2019, p. 428). This is visible in the stories of Veronica, Hannah, and Ross. Veronica likened the process of making friends as a school shooting survivor to coming out for an LGBTQIA+ person. Continually explaining her story to each new person was exhausting, and she found herself worrying about how her story would affect the person hearing it. Ross and Hannah described similar encounters, which led to unpleasant questions from their peers and uncomfortable or awkward reactions when details of their experiences were shared. Berkley et al. (2019) described the need to disguise oneself as a form of emotional labor. When people engage in “surface acting” by trying to fit in by only revealing similar identities or experiences to those around them, the actor experiences a sense of inauthenticity (Berkley et al., 2019). This was apparent in the way that Veronica and Lauren were careful about who they connected with on social media and how all three participants made efforts to avoid admitting they are from Parkland, Florida. Veronica shared that keeping up with what parts of her identity she shared with each person was exhausting. Hiding one’s invisible identity can cause them to feel socially isolated, depressed,

and anxious (Berkley et al., 2019). Berkley et al., found that disclosing one's hidden identity factors can cause emotional exhaustion as Veronica expounded. However, they posited that expressing one's identity can be a challenging process with positive rewards, including feeling more engaged in relationships, less anxious, less depressed, more socially supported, and more self-accepting (Berkley et al., 2019). Cipollina et al. (2022) studied the relationship between one's directness when sharing a concealed identity and the influence of the recipient's response. The study found that when recipients were engaged with the disclosure (verbal discussion, supportive gestures, etc.) the person disclosing their identity felt more supported and validated (Cipollina et al., 2022). When received in a positive and engaging way, sharing the concealed identity may relieve the emotional burden on the person hiding their identity. In this case, Veronica credits therapy for helping her navigate sharing her identity as a school shooting survivor and advocate. She recognizes that she is not responsible for other people's feelings or reactions to her experiences. However, all three participants continue to avoid disclosing elements of their identities to avoid negative responses or discussions of their trauma.

Research Question Two – College Experience

How do MSDHS shooting survivors explain their college experiences?

Narrative Elements Explained by Previous Research

Schlossberg's Transition Theory is not applicable for the analysis of research question two. This question seeks to understand what college is like for participants after they have finished their transition to college. This is considered the taking charge phase, which describes the end of a transition where the person is comfortable and ready to explore their next transition or phase (Goodman et al., 2006). To best understand the experience of MSDHS shooting

survivors in college, this study will highlight affirmations and deviations with existing academic research.

Co-Curricular Involvement

Often higher education professionals encourage first-year students to get involved on college campuses to ease their transition and connect to their new community. Studies have found that making friends through these avenues can make the university environment less overwhelming for students and create a greater sense of attachment with the institution (Yazedjian et al., 2007). Each participant in this study described getting involved in different organizations and how that influenced their ability to make friends and feel connected to campus.

Research shows that students most frequently reported finding friends in residence halls, classes, and student organizations (Yazedjian et al., 2007). All three participants joined organizations to make friends and feel part of their college community. Veronica credits involvement in student organizations for her ability to find friends and feel connected to campus. She explained that her life is highly political outside of school so, she sought art-based involvement opportunities to explore her interests and meet like-minded people. She intentionally joined organizations that would bring her joy, like editing the school newspaper. Hannah and Ross had less success with making connections in student organizations.

Hannah joined a few organizations on campus; however, she found difficulty making friends in those spaces. She felt that because no one could relate to her life experiences it was hard to make authentic relationships with them. In contrast to Veronica, Hannah did not describe campus involvement as a support to her transition or a successful way for her to connect with peers or a support network. Hannah described over-committing to co-curricular involvement in her freshman year, which she ultimately ignored and stepped away from. Researchers have

sought to understand the influence of overinvolvement in college. Research shows that overinvolved students may encounter considerable difficulties which include insufficient sleep, poor diet, damaged relationships, and debilitating levels of stress due to their responsibilities and extreme commitment (Couch, 2016).

She also explained that her whirlwind involvement with March for Our Lives burnt her out and she never recovered before going to college. In Hannah's case, involvement became a stressor during her early college experience while she struggled to make connections and feel comfortable in her new community. Similarly, Ross felt it was difficult to be involved in co-curricular activities due to COVID-19. He explained that being involved in a virtual capacity was not fulfilling so he stepped away from any co-curricular involvement he was in.

Co-curricular involvement was very different for each participant. Veronica found fulfillment in co-curricular involvement, citing it as a way to shape her experience and identity in college to not focus entirely on advocacy or political work. She discussed meeting like-minded friends in those involvement opportunities and joy in her experiences. Veronica's experiences affirm what many studies have posited. Research has shown that participation in student organizations tends to lead to not only a greater involvement in the overall college experience but also to a higher quality educational experience (Abrahamowicz, 1988). Veronica and Ross had divergent experiences with studies that support positive outcomes due to campus involvement. Hannah found it hard to connect with peers because of her past traumas, explaining that PTSD makes her feel different from everyone around her. She felt that peers could not understand her experience, which overshadowed her possibility of deep connection through co-curricular involvement. She also described being over-involved which may have influenced her desire to be involved and any positive outcomes attached to co-curricular involvement. Ross felt

that there was no point in being involved due to a virtual environment during COVID-19. Future research may explore the phenomenon of campus involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mental Health in College

Mental health of college students is an important topic frequently studied and discussed. Research shows that globally, one in three first-year college students will experience symptoms of at least one diagnosable mental health disorder, most frequently major depressive disorder or generalized anxiety disorder (Auerbach et al., 2018). Mental health is a topic that was discussed by each participant separately. Hannah, Veronica, and Ross discussed the importance of mental health support services as they coped with the transition to college, trauma of surviving a school shooting, failed friendships, and managed the stressors of college.

All three participants discussed the importance of mental health therapy throughout their narratives. Veronica explained how her therapist played an active role in preparing her for the transition to college and navigating every-day challenges. She calls her therapist a mentor because of the support she received going to college, having an ill parent, and managing her trauma. Hannah, too, shared the necessity of good mental health support. Veronica shared that the stress of transitioning to college resulted in physical illness in her first month of college. Conley et al. (2020) found a sharp increase in psychological distress and decrease in psychological and social well-being among first-year college students with a plateau after the initial period of transition. Veronica's story is congruent with what Conley and peers (2020) described in their study. She felt overwhelming stress at the beginning of college but calmed as she met her roommate and made connections on campus.

Veronica discussed that finding joy in her everyday experiences was important to prove that the shooter did not take her life away. She explained, "just living my life and being a college

student and prioritizing having fun and doing things with friends that's powerful and I don't think people give that enough recognition.” Veronica’s explanation of how she copes with the trauma and continues to persevere is evidence of Grad and Zeligman’s (2017) study results. The found that when a survivor can find meaning following a traumatic experience, that may predict posttraumatic growth which is often associated with better emotional outcomes following trauma (Grad & Zeligman, 2017). Veronica’s story details how she has processed her trauma in ways that display fortitude and hope for her future. This could be evident of Grad and Zeligman’s (2017) findings. It could also be that she has had more time to process the trauma than Hannah and Ross did before transitioning to college. Veronica has storied a more positive college experience in her first year than Hannah shared.

Hannah recounted that the summer of 2019, right before college, was when she felt the gravity of the school shooting and began truly processing the trauma. She described feeling the loss of friendships and the trauma of her experiences when her life slowed down. Hannah struggled to make connections in college with her peers, feeling that they couldn’t connect due to her life experiences and trauma. She also began feeling that she neglected her studies at the end of high school and was ill equipped for the challenge of an Ivy League school. However, Hannah’s mental health trauma is more extensive than the traditional college student considering her disclosed PTSD. Research has shown that trauma-exposed undergraduate students frequently report higher rates of functional impairment, including decreased engagement in school and work, difficulties with activities of daily living, and disengagement of personal relationships or other social pursuits (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2013; Im et al., 2020). Hannah described immense difficulty with relationships and social pursuits due to her PTSD making her feel like she was different from everyone else. She described finding joy in her relationship with her

boyfriend and roommate; however, she still struggles to connect with others based on their inability to understand the trauma she has endured.

Ross discussed his difficulty getting quality mental health support in college at length. This is a significant challenge in his college experience that triggered aroused speech and anger with his mental health encounters. Ross described inadequate mental health support in Florida following the shooting, and after moving his college was not equipped to support his needs. Previous research shows that college students who have survived trauma may experience anger, withdrawal, or fear, as well as substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and self-harm (Frazier et al., 2009). Ross displayed frequent anger with mental health support services in college, detailing traumatization and lack of support in times of crisis.

Ross's story is consistent with previous research on trauma exposed college students. His narrative is consistent with findings of decreased engagement in school, difficulties with activities of daily living, and disengagement of personal relationships (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2013; Im et al., 2020). Much of Ross's narrative detailed these challenges. He described triggering events that regularly happen on a college campus like fire drills or fire alarms being set off by peers making popcorn or burning food. A routine fire drill could create significant distress causing him to miss class and disengage with peers. Psychological challenges seem to be the biggest challenge for Ross in his college experience. His narrative regularly explored negative experiences with mental health services in college and at home in Florida. It is apparent in his narrative that Ross has not received the same level of mental health support that Veronica and Hannah have. He has not been given the opportunity to process his high school, transition, or college experiences with a licensed professional that has left a lasting impact.

Veronica, Hannah, and Ross all explain the importance of mental health support after the endured trauma in high school. Each had different experiences with finding mental health resources both in Florida and at their respective colleges. Veronica and Hannah both cite mental health services as important elements of their transition and coping with trauma in college. They both also value friends who can relate to their trauma and have had shared experience, even though they are negative. Hannah feels that people who have not experienced the same trauma cannot understand her experience or viewpoints. Veronica finds it important to celebrate life with the people who were in the school shooting as a form of protest. Both Hannah and Veronica have clearly processed their experiences with a therapist which is apparent in the way they narrate those events and understand perspectives of peers who may have hurt them. Ross does not seem to have the same privilege of mental health support. He describes challenges of finding adequate care and relived trauma because of his search for care. His narrative is very negative and does not take any other perspective than his own. This contrasts with Hannah and Veronica who can explain their experience and rationalize why others have treated them in a certain negative way. All three participants have spoken on the need for adequate mental health services in high school and college.

Advocacy Work

Each participant in this study was heavily involved in advocacy work through March for Our Lives before they went to college. As March for Our Lives founders, participants in this study spent significant time before college advocating for gun control, hoping to prevent future mass shootings (Alhanti et al., 2018). They individually discussed the influence advocacy work and their persona as advocates had on their college experience. Veronica, Hannah, and Ross also described their chosen level of participation in advocacy work while pursuing higher education.

Veronica and Hannah described burnout from their dedication to advocacy work after surviving their high school shooting. Both discussed how proud they were of the work they had done with March for Our Lives and the amazing conversations and connections they made with government officials and celebrities that supported their cause. In college they hoped to step away from the traditional advocacy work they had done to explore their interests and find joy in common college experiences. Research shows that students who engage in activism sometimes engage all their energy into the cause and leave little energy for academics, co-curricular involvement, or creative ventures (Linder et al., 2019). Likely from having a similar experience in high school, Veronica and Hannah were both careful to not repeat their full commitment to specific causes.

Veronica described dedicating her entire high school career to gun control advocacy. In college, she has reframed what her definition of advocacy work is. Veronica explained that by simply living her life and finding joy in her experiences, she is protesting the control the school shooter wanted to have over her life. Veronica recognizes that her experiences have led her to be an advocate in her daily life by showing that active shooters cannot take her future away. While not displayed in common ways like protests and lobbying, Veronica is a symbol for gun control advocacy and seeks to live her life in a way that exemplifies how society should treat one another, the importance of the arts, and care for mental health. Involvement in the arts has been a focus for Veronica both as a political advocacy method and a way to escape the political elements of her life. She seeks to protest through art and different mediums than she used throughout her time in March for Our Lives. Advocacy remains a prominent part of her college experience, but she has redefined what advocacy means to her.

Hannah was involved in advocacy co-curricular activities but was also taking time to explore her interests. She described fulfilling a narrative that was created for her and not having space to separate herself from her advocacy roles. When the COVID-19 pandemic began she used that time to step away from her advocacy roles and spend time exploring her interests and things that could bring her joy.

Hannah explained that detaching from the role of gun control advocate was important for her sense of self and how others perceived her. She did not want to be defined solely as a school shooting survivor and feels like her involvement in March for Our Lives and being a public figure for gun reform has become her full identity when meeting new people. Hannah has stepped away from most advocacy roles in college. She described being burnt-out when she went to college because of her dedication to gun control advocacy for over a year. Advocacy burnout is a common experience explained in academic research. Linder and colleagues (2019) found that student activism may have influence emotional wellbeing. Students in the study reported feelings of burn out, having a limited amount of energy, emotional exhaustion, and mental exhaustion (Linder et al., 2019). Though the Linder et al. (2019) study focused on college students, Hannah described similar experiences of mental and emotional exhaustion after traveling to support gun control legislation.

Of the three participants, Ross spoke the most about advocacy being an active part of his college experience. When asked if advocacy is still a part of his college life, he answered, “I consider it the, the largest part.” Ross spoke about dedicating his life to advocacy for human rights which is his area of study at an international level. He spoke at length about participating in Black Lives Matter protests and continuing to advocate for gun legislation reform. Ross is

passionate about his role as an advocate and fighting for his beliefs. He intends to make advocacy a cornerstone of his future career.

Each participant has a different relationship with advocacy work. They all dedicated significant time after the school shooting to March for Our Lives, traveling the country to raise awareness and meeting with politicians to explain their perspective. Now in college, all three have different perspectives and approaches to advocacy. Each of them expressed that they still care deeply about gun control. Hannah is grappling with her identity and how people perceive her, Veronica is evolving her approach to advocacy work, and Ross is still deeply invested in traditional advocacy approaches. While they all have had similar experiences before college, they are each choosing to move forward differently and control the way advocacy influences their college experience.

Narrative Elements That Cannot be Explained by Previous Research

The Influence of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic began in North America in March 2020. The rapidly spreading disease sparked the beginning of virtual schooling, work, and isolation from others. For each of the participants, the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their college experience and transition in different ways. While not a focus of this study, it influenced the experience of these students.

As a freshman in Fall 2021, Veronica said COVID-19 played a major role in her transition from High School to College. She had experienced a virtual high school environment which became a major area of concern as she prepared to go to college. Veronica was worried that she would need to begin college virtually and she was desperately hoping for a more normal college experience after an incredibly unique high school story. Outside of being a stressor for

Veronica, COVID-19 had minimal impact on her college experience. She was able to move into her residence hall and attend classes in-person getting the full college experience her first year.

COVID-19 began in Hannah's second semester on campus. She was sent home and remained home through spring of her sophomore year. Hannah credits COVID-19 for her ability to slow down and step away from things. It allowed her space and time to think about her involvement and mental health. Hannah explained that she was working to redefine who she was outside of being an advocate and the pandemic gave her space to do that. This seems to be an important time in Hannah's transition and evaluation of who she is. She described a heavy influence from outside sources, which dictated who she saw herself as and what she majored in. This time allowed Hannah to reevaluate and when she came back to school in person, she stepped away from all advocacy groups she was previously involved in.

Ross cited COVID-19 as a major influence over his college experience. He was traveling internationally on a spring break trip when the pandemic began. He found it difficult to get involved on campus, connect with faculty and staff on campus, or make social connections due to the virtual format. Ross also described challenges being home and trying to take classes, so he returned to campus in August of 2020 when an apartment lease began. Ross credits COVID-19 and a virtual school environment for his difficulty making connections and getting involved on campus.

The timing of COVID-19 is an important factor in the experience of each participant. The pandemic changed the landscape of higher education and our world as isolation became a tactic of survival and virtual education became commonplace. Isolation raised mental health concerns across the nation as people grappled with a changing social environment. How COVID-19

changed higher education and student involvement, particularly for students with prior trauma or PTSD, is an area yet to be researched.

Summary of Findings

Schlossberg's Explanatory Power.

The purpose of this study was to explore the narrative of how students have been influenced by their experience surviving the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting. To answer the first research question, how surviving a school shooting influenced survivors' transition to college, this study examined their narrative through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory. The four S's which, include situation, self, support, and strategies for coping, each provided a deeper understanding of participant narratives.

Situational factors described by Schlossberg's transition theory played a significant role in each participant's transition to college. Specifically, timing, control, duration, concurrent stress, experience with a previous transition, and role change were significant factors in each of their stories. Timing of transition illustrated differences in each participant's story. Hannah, who transitioned to college the quickest after graduating from college, demonstrated the greatest difficulty in transitioning. Where Veronica, who had the most time before her transition to college, explained a smooth and short transition. Hannah and Ross described difficulty in transition because they were still processing trauma from high school and Veronica had more time to process and work with mental health professionals before the transition. Schlossberg's transition theory helped explain what elements of the transition participants perceive to be within their control, specifically, controlling how their peers would perceive them. They sought control of how they were perceived and what questions they would get based on their past traumas which was an exhausting endeavor for each participant. They spent significant time and effort

hiding their hometown or social media accounts in an effort to control the conversation and avoid discussion of their trauma. Concurrent stress, one of Schlossberg's situation factors, was present in each narrative for different reasons. Hannah was experiencing stress over lost friendships from high school and how people perceived her advocacy work. Ross was experiencing stress from his departure from March for Our Lives and how he felt his work was undervalued. Veronica was feeling stress because of her father's illness. Each of these areas of concurrent stress influenced participant transitions to college. Duration of the transition, as Schlossberg explained, was another closely tied part of each narrative. Hannah felt that her transition was incredibly long, and she struggled to make connections and feel comfortable at college. She questioned how long this transition would last. Schlossberg highlighted that people may question the length of a transition and that transition is not over until one perceives it to be over. Hannah struggled with feeling the end of her transition. In contrast, Veronica felt she had a quick transition and felt comfortable and connected with her environment quickly. Ross was very transactional in the way he discussed his transition, stating that he just needed to go to college. He shared no emotion and did not provide significant detail about his transition. Lastly, experience with a previous transition and role change were elements of Schlossberg's transition theory that emerged in each participant's story. Each participant was heavily involved in advocacy work through March for Our Lives following the school shooting. Their role changed immediately after the shooting happened as they became public figures and advocates for gun control. They all described a change in their high school environment after the shooting as a transition experience. Schlossberg explained that experience with a previous transition can influence the way one copes to a new transition. Each participant had a negative experience with transition in high school as the environment became unsupportive and peers questioned their

involvement with March for Our Lives. Role change was a significant element of their high school transition and reemerged in college. When they transitioned to college, they focused on being a student which was a significant change for them. Veronica and Hannah welcomed the change and longed to be an average college student. Ross still described himself as an advocate first but discussed his transition from March for Our Lives to an independent advocate. While the role change was described as liberating for Veronica and Hannah, Ross viewed it as a loss when he left March for Our Lives and went to college. Situational factors of Schlossberg's theory have great explanatory power when reviewing the transition narrative of each participant. However, Schlossberg's sense of self provided significant insight into the survivor transition experience.

Perhaps the most remarkable illustration of Schlossberg's four S's in the participants' transitions to college is their sense of self. This area of Schlossberg's transition theory includes two categories: personal (or demographic) characteristics and psychological resources. Both personal and psychological elements of self were prominent in the transition narratives. This was an expected outcome of the school shooting; however, the extent that sense of self influenced participant transition was substantial. This can be explained by the high-profile nature of advocacy work with March for Our Lives. Schlossberg posited that personal and demographic characteristics affect how an individual views life (Evans et al., 2010). Veronica, Hannah, and Ross all masked elements of their identities to make connections with peers. Their sense of self was challenged in the transition by trying to navigate how to share their identity, story, and background in a relatable way. They were purposely vague about their hometown to avoid discussion of their past traumas and high school experiences. Veronica and Hannah detailed hiding their involvement with March for Our Lives so they could build authentic relationships with peers and avoid being idolized for the advocacy work they did. Ross did not hide his

involvement because he wanted to be recognized as an advocate which was central to his sense of self. Each participant wanted their peers to perceive them based on whatever identity factors were most significant individually. While they all navigated how peers would question their identity and experience as a school shooting survivor similarly, they navigated their identities as advocates and public figures differently based on how they wanted to be perceived. The second half of Schlossberg's sense of self is explained by psychological resources which aid in coping and include ego development, outlook, and commitment and values (Evans et al., 2010). Each participant detailed the importance of psychological resources to cope with their traumas. Veronica and Hannah storied successes with different types of therapy which helped their transition and experience in college. Ross, however, did not have the same access to mental health support and discussed how the university mental health resources were insufficient to support his trauma and transition. Psychological resources and coping were polarizing elements of participant narratives, which were apparent in the discussion of experience. Hannah and Veronica showed significant signs of processing their experiences with psychological supports where Ross did not.

Schlossberg highlighted support as a significant factor in transition which considers four times of support - intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions or communities. Each participant highlighted family members as a main component of support in their transitions. Ross cited family being his only support in his transition. Hannah and Veronica considered friends from home, mental health professionals, and professional staff from March for Our Lives as additional supports. No one considered the college community or staff to be a support in their transition. This is an area of growth for colleges and universities to consider how

they support school shooting survivors or students who have experienced trauma in their college transition.

Lastly, strategies for coping account for the fourth S in Schlossberg's transition theory. This explores coping approaches that people employ to ease a transition. Schlossberg highlighted four coping modes that include information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior. Hannah and Veronica used therapy as a strategy for coping with their transition which could be described as intrapsychic behavior. Ross seemed to use direct action to cope with the emotions of the tragedy he experienced and the transition period that followed. He continued to seek opportunities for involvement in social justice movements using advocacy work as a strategy to cope.

Veronica, Hannah, and Ross each shared how surviving the MSDHS shooting influenced their transition to college. Schlossberg's transition theory has explanatory power to better understand school shooting survivor transition experiences and coping techniques. Participant stories illustrate difficulty making connections in college due to their high school experience, the importance of support networks, and how imperative mental health support is for trauma exposed students. While much of their story is comprehensible through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory, there are elements of participant stories that are not explained.

What Schlossberg's Transition Theory Failed to Explain

The transition period from high school to college was best understood through Schlossberg's theory. However, participants shared their experiences throughout their transition and during their time in college, some of which could not be understood by the transition theory. For deeper understanding we looked to existing literature for greater understanding of the student experience. Salient elements of student narratives that are outside of the transition theory include

how Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and mental health plays a role in participant experience, concealing elements of identity, co-curricular involvement, and the influence of advocacy work. These factors appeared throughout participant narratives but are not fully understood using Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

Hannah disclosed a diagnosis of PTSD and how it influences her college transition and experience. Hannah described difficulty in classroom performance and the inability to connect with peers, which is consistent with previous studies on trauma-exposed college students (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2013; Im et al., 2020). She detailed feeling different than everyone around her and that she could not authentically connect with someone who has not experienced the trauma she has. This was a major struggle for Hannah as she attempted to build relationships in college. Shalka and Leal (2022) found that students with PTSD had difficulty relating to peers and had a lower sense of belonging on campus than their peers who were not diagnosed with PTSD. Hannah's story is consistent with Shalka and Leal's (2022) findings. Further, Ross's tendency to isolate, difficulty relating to peers, lack of belonging on campus, and anger/dissatisfaction can be explained by PTSD, depression, anxiety, or a variety of other mental health challenges supported by previous research (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2013; Im et al., 2020; Shalka & Leal, 2022). Each participant shared their experiences with mental health professionals and how that helped or hindered their college transition and experience. There was disparity between the support rendered to participants in this study. The women in this study shared success with therapy to manage their trauma or PTSD, while Ross struggled to find appropriate resources to support his mental health needs. This created a barrier when sharing his story and he displayed anger when discussing the lack of support his college provided. He explained encounters of being re-traumatized by college counseling personnel and lack of

support in times of crisis. Results of this study reinforce the need for well-equipped mental health counseling centers on college campuses and connections to resources in the local community.

Schlossberg's transition theory explained how participants' sense of self played a role in their transition to college. However, the theory was insufficient in explaining the depths of why participants felt they needed to conceal elements of their identity related to the school shooting. All three participants shared that they concealed elements of their identity including their hometown, where they attended high school, their involvement in March for Our Lives, and their experienced trauma to avoid uncomfortable conversations. Berkley et al. (2019) described the need to disguise oneself as a form of emotional labor when people engage in "surface acting" by only revealing similar identities or experiences to those around them, leading to a sense of inauthenticity. This study supports those findings through participant narratives around their effort to conceal their identity as a school shooting survivor. Survivor identity concealment during the transition to college was an unexpected but prominent outcome of this study. Participant stories converged to highlight how being a school shooting survivor eclipsed their identities when meeting new people and why they chose to conceal this part of their identity.

Getting involved on campus and participating in co-curricular activities was different for each participant. Veronica found fulfillment in co-curricular involvement in art groups, allowing her to focus her energy on things that bring her joy and away from advocacy or political work. She discussed meeting like-minded friends in those involvement opportunities and joy in her experiences. Veronica's experiences affirm what many studies have posited, that participation in student organizations tends to lead to not only a greater involvement in the overall college experience but also to a higher quality educational experience (Abrahamowicz, 1988). However,

Hannah described being over-involved which may have influenced her desire to be involved and hindered any positive outcomes attached to co-curricular engagement. Hannah's experience was consistent with Couch's (2016) study that found that overinvolved students may encounter considerable difficulties, including insufficient sleep, poor diet, damaged relationships, and debilitating levels of stress due to their responsibilities and extreme commitment (Couch, 2016). She also cited PTSD as a roadblock to her co-curricular involvement and difficulty making authentic connections with her peers. Ross's experience cannot be explained by current research. He felt that there was no point in being involved due to a virtual environment during COVID-19. Future research may explain the phenomenon of campus involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lastly, this study uncovered important information on the influence of advocacy work for young adults. Hannah and Veronica both described a whirlwind of advocacy work with March for Our Lives and the lasting influence it has had on their lives. Linder and colleagues (2019) found that student activism may have influence over emotional wellbeing. Students in the study reported feelings of burn out, having a limited amount of energy, emotional exhaustion, and mental exhaustion (Linder et al., 2019). Hannah and Veronica described these feelings of exhaustion prior to their transition to college, further supporting the findings of Linder et al. (2019). Hannah specifically cites burnout from March for Our Lives as an element of difficulty in her transition. Burn out from advocacy work and feeling a loss of friendships hindered Hannah's emotional wellbeing and energy as she entered college. Ross also supports the findings of Linder and colleagues (2019), noting that he is focused on causes he believes in and finds little time for involvement in organizations or coursework.

This study offered new insights into school shooting survivor experiences transitioning to and in college. Much of participant experiences can be understood through Schlossberg's transition theory and previous research. However, there is significant need for further research on how school shooting trauma informs the college student transition and experience. This study rendered important findings about how trauma, the role of advocate, and identity are uniquely connected for participants. This study contributed to the literature by exploring how surviving the MSDHS shooting and participation in March for Our Lives influenced transition to and experience in college for study participants.

Limitations of the Research

Though appropriate for narrative inquiry, a sample size of three participants could be considered a limitation of this study. This study used a purposive sampling method which is often used in narrative inquiry studies. Participants for this study needed to be students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School during the 2017-2018 academic year and be in or transitioning to college to qualify for this study. Through extensive outreach only three students met the qualifications and were willing to participate in this study. Had more students participated in this study, there would be more individual narratives to affirm findings of this study.

All participants were co-founders of March for Our Lives. Each of their narratives, though unique, detailed a specific sub-group of MSDHS shooting survivor experiences. Had the study included participants uninvolved with March for Our Lives, there likely would have been divergent findings. Additionally, all participants left Florida for higher education and were racially analogous. Diversity in identity or experience would have added depth to the study. The sample successfully represented different class years (freshman, junior, senior) which allowed

for comparison of time before transition to college. Though substantial effort was placed on recruiting a sophomore representative, the study failed to represent that class.

Interviews were conducted through Zoom for this study. Most communication was through email between the researcher and participants. The researcher never visited the students in college to see their experience first-hand. Though participants were comfortable on Zoom and provided deep insight into their experiences, visiting students in-person may have provided more concrete evidence of their experiences.

Data were collected for this study during one academic year. Deeper understanding of the student experience could be gained by a longitudinal study from transition to graduation. This study is a snapshot in time of participant feelings, recall of experiences, and narrative reflective of their memories. Hannah and Ross are now Juniors in college, so the narrative of their transition relies on how they recalled their experiences. Veronica was in her second semester at college when her interview was conducted so her memories of transition were fresh in her mind. Significant depth could be attained through a longitudinal study that builds upon Veronica's narrative in this study.

Implications for Research and Practice

Mental health support and therapeutic services were central to all participant narratives in this study. The National Healthy Minds Study, which surveys thousands of undergraduate and graduate students annually, reported that the number of students who screened positive for anxiety jumped from 17% to 31% over six years (Eisenberg et al., 2019). Statistics more than doubled from 8% in 2009 to 18% in 2019 for students screening positively for major depression (Eisenberg et al., 2019). It is apparent that mental health is a significant factor for college aged

students. Institutions of Higher Education, faculty, and college staff must lead with mental health in mind. Colleges should provide ample mental health resources to support students in need.

This study highlighted the impact of PTSD on a student transitioning to college. Hannah shared her difficulty transitioning and making friends due to her PTSD making her feel like she could not relate to others. Studies have shown that PTSD has a substantial impact on a survivor's daily life in which a traumatic event overwhelms their ability to cope in relation to the trauma (Shalka & Leal, 2022). Various studies report an estimated 59% to 75% of undergraduate students reporting exposure in their lifetime to one or more traumatic event (Im et al., 2020). Considering the high prevalence of trauma in college student lives, individuals working with college students have a responsibility to be informed of the experiences and influences over how trauma survivors make sense of their experiences (Zeligman et al., 2019). Read et al. (2011) found that 9% of trauma exposed first year freshman have or develop PTSD in college. They also found that the most common traumas among the 3,014 students in the study were life-threatening illness and sudden and unexpected death of a loved one (Read et al., 2011). More research should be done to broaden the scope of traumatic event exposure included in the literature. Higher education professionals must be attentive and accommodating to students struggling with past trauma exposures or PTSD.

Research is severely limited on school shooting survivors. A wealth of knowledge exists concerning shooting actors and best practices to prevent future school shootings. However, the influence of this specific traumatic event is widely unknown. Additionally, school shootings continue to occur in the United States, likely re-exposing student survivors to feelings of trauma. It is important that faculty and staff are trained to support students who struggle with mental health disorders and provide appropriate accommodations when needed. During this study, Robb

Elementary school in Uvalde, Texas suffered a mass shooting killing 19 children and two teachers (The New York Times, 2022). Many mass shootings occurred during 2022 including a racially motivated shooting in Buffalo, New York, and a shooting in Highland Park, Illinois at a Fourth of July parade (The New York Times, 2022). Parkland shooting survivors were called on by the media to share their stories and advocate for gun control, re-exposing them to their traumas and forcing them back into the role of spokesperson. This study found that there is a need for continued attention not just on survivors who are actively engaged in advocacy work, but the larger group of survivors of school shootings.

The 2018 Stress in America Survey: Generation Z reported that 75% of youth ages 15 to 21 report significant stress related to mass shootings and school shootings (American Psychological Association, 2018). Further, 56% of Generation Z survey participants report that they experience stress when considering the possibility of a shooting at their school (American Psychological Association, 2018). According to the Washington Post's school shooting database, while school shootings remain rare, 2021 accrued 42 acts of gun violence on K-12 grounds during the school day (Cox et al., 2022). So far, in June 2022, there have been 24 acts of gun violence on K-12 school grounds (Cox et al., 2022). The latest mass school shooting happened at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde Texas where an 18-year-old male opened fire, killing 19 children and two adults (Cox et al., 2022). The frequency of school shootings in North America is cause for concern when considering the safety fears, mental health needs, and trauma of future generations of college students. This study provided a glimpse into the experiences of school shooting survivors as they transition to and navigate college. Universities must be prepared to support student needs and provide accommodations for gun violence trauma-exposed students. This includes ample mental health resources on campus or in the surrounding community.

Universities must also recognize how newly occurring school shootings or mass shootings may impact previously exposed students. Institutions of higher education should facilitate specific transition meetings with students who have experienced school shootings to provide mental health, transition, and community building support. This could be done through PTSD group sessions, meeting with student success coaches, or mental health providers.

Future Research Possibilities

This study provided insight into the experience of school shooting survivors in college that did not previously exist. Narrative interviews uncovered important elements of participant encounters that were unexpected and unexplained by previous research. First, participants described the felt need to conceal their identities when meeting new people. All participants in this study shared that they were intentionally vague about their hometown and high school. Their school shooting trauma was extensively covered by the media and often referred to as the “Parkland Shooting”. When introducing themselves from Parkland, Florida the school shooting frequently came up in conversation. Participants described being vague about their hometown as a protection from sparking a conversation about their trauma and the unknown of what their peers would ask about that day. Previous research shows that people with concealable stigmas can hide them to pass as the favored in-group which avoids negative consequences associated with their identity; however, this adds emotional labor of hiding their identity (Berkley et al., 2019) Future research should explore the influence of concealing identity factors as a school shooting survivor and the emotional labor that results from this practice.

Similarly, future research should explore how advocacy work may influence identity and relationships in college. Previous research found that some students feel a responsibility to engage in activism, which results in them “forgoing the luxury of merely being a student and

being able to invest most of their energy in academic, creative, and co-curricular activities that earn them cultural capital in college and beyond” (Linder et al., 2019, p. 47). Participants in this study experienced the consequences of devoting their time to advocacy work which Linder et al. (2019) found in their study of college students. Due to involvement in March for Our Lives, which was a public advocacy group, participants became recognizable public figures through media interviews, books they have published, and social media. This study showed that their position as a public figure made it challenging to make authentic relationships with peers. Their stories are unique because of the media coverage, meetings with legislators, and time intensive dedication to the cause that is not always possible when the advocacy work is not as organized or supported. The influence of high-level, immersive, and nationally recognized advocacy work in high school is a unique area that influenced participants in the current study and is not currently addressed by previous research.

Lastly, a longitudinal study of school shooting survivors’ experience in college would add depth to the information uncovered in this study. Following a school shooting survivor from their transition from high school through college graduation would provide more timely perspectives on their experiences. Much of this study relied on participants reflecting on their lived experience. Hannah and Ross had to reflect about two years to share transition experience which allows time for their memories to change and evolve. Veronica discussed her transition much closer to the time it occurred, allowing memories to be fresh and recent. Meeting with a school shooting survivor more regularly throughout their college experience would provide additional depth to their narrative and a more accurate description of their time in college.

Final Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to tell the story of how students have been influenced by their experience surviving the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting during their transition to and performance in higher education. There is an extensive body of school shooting research exploring causes, how to recognize a threat, and what preparedness measures are effective (Lee et al., 2020; Muchert, 2007). However, there is insufficient research on how experiencing a school shooting influences the transition to college and experience in college for surviving students.

This study filled a gap in the literature by telling the story of how surviving a school shooting influences the transition to and experience in college for undergraduate students. Trauma amongst college students is a well-studied area of literature where various studies report an estimated 59% to 75% of undergraduate students reporting exposure in their lifetime to one or more traumatic event (Im et al., 2020). Previous research found that trauma exposed undergraduate students frequently report higher rates of functional impairment, including decreased engagement in school and work, difficulties with activities of daily living, and disengagement of personal relationships or other social pursuits (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2013; Im et al., 2020). Considering the high prevalence of trauma in college student lives, individuals working with college students have a responsibility to be informed of the experiences and influences over how trauma survivors make sense of their experiences (Zeligman et al., 2019). Participants of this study shared important information and perspective on their challenges making friends, processing trauma, achieving academically in college, and exploring their interests outside of advocacy work consistent with previous studies that demonstrate difficulty with these areas (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2013; Im et al., 2020). Findings

demonstrate the importance of substantial mental health support in college. The current study furthers previous research in exhibiting how students are forced to relive trauma through the occurrence of mass shootings in the United States. Participants of this study are frequently expected to act as spokespeople for their experience which was demonstrated following the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, Texas. Hannah and Veronica were called upon to appear in the news and speak out against gun violence though they are personally trying to step away from this advocate role.

An unexpected outcome of this study was participant desire to conceal their identity as a school shooting survivor and March for Our Lives co-founder. This study is unique in that it complicates the way college students are expected to transition. Participants narrated how trauma informed their transition and was further complicated by their role as public figures because of their trauma. Surviving a school shooting is unique but being a recognized name leading the March for Our Lives made study participants like celebrities to their peers, forcing them to navigate college differently than other students. Participants desired to hide these elements of their identity to have a better shot at creating true authentic relationships not tied to political connections or traumatic details of their experience. Researchers have studied the challenges of managing an invisible stigmatized identity and the tension it created during social interactions. They have found that people with concealable stigmas, such as mental illness or sexual orientation, can hide the identity and pass as a member of the favored in-group to avoid negative consequences from revealing their out-group identity (Berkley et al., 2019; Goffman, 1972). This study widens the scope of concealable identities and how they can be used. Being a well-known public figure is often desired in society however, participants in this study hid their

accomplishments with March for Our Lives to create authentic relationships and avoid uncomfortable conversations when meeting new people.

Lastly, this study is unique due to the high level of advocacy work done as founders of the March for Our Lives movement. Previous research discussed the encompassing work of advocacy for minoritized identities as they struggle to see themselves represented in the curriculum and traditions of higher education which motivates them to engage in activism to create a more equitable experience (Linder et al., 2019; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). Further, researchers have explained that students who engage in activism sometimes expend all their energy into the cause and leave little energy for academics, co-curricular involvement, or creative ventures (Linder et al., 2019). This was true for participants of this study before their college transition. During their transition to college, they struggled to separate themselves from the advocacy work when it was time to go to college. While previous research focuses on identity-based advocacy work, this study explored how advocacy can embed itself into one's identity. Participants became public figures easily recognized for their traumatic experience and national work for gun control. This study highlights the difficulty of separating from advocacy work and grappling with identity after frequent appearances in the media. While participants are proud of their accomplishments, they now question what it is like to be a college student without their experienced trauma and advocacy responsibilities.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear [Name],

This letter is a request for you to take part in a research project to understand the experiences of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting survivors who have transitioned to higher education with the intent to create personal narratives of how surviving a school shooting has influenced the transition to and experience in college. This project is being conducted by Jayne Piskorik, a student in the Higher Education Administration Ph.D. program at West Virginia University. The study will consist of two interviews lasting one hour each over two different days.

During the interview, we will meet via Zoom, for the first of two interviews. It will last for approximately one hour. The interview will be recorded via Zoom for my reference while writing my dissertation. The recording will never be published or shared outside of my faculty dissertation committee. Next, we will schedule a follow up interview, to be conducted via Zoom, which will again be about one hour. During this interview I will ask you to share artifacts (pictures, social media posts, poems, etc.) that help tell the story of your experience transitioning to and in college. Lastly, I will send you what I have composed and ask you to review the narrative and provide any necessary feedback ensuring your story is accurately described.

The interviews will be automatically transcribed by Zoom technology and edited by me. Only myself and my faculty dissertation committee will have access to the transcripts. However, excerpts from the interview will be included in my dissertation to accurately describe your experiences and story. You will be given a pseudonym to conceal your identity. I will protect your confidentiality by keeping all recorded interviews and transcripts in a secured file location and using pseudonyms to represent your name and college details.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer and you may discontinue at any time. The Institutional Review Board protocol number for this research, entitled, "A Narrative Inquiry into the Influence of School Shooting Survival on College Transition and Experience," is 2201496908. West Virginia University's Institutional Review Board's approval of this project is on file.

Discomforts, Alternatives, and Benefits

You may experience discomfort thinking and talking about the Marjory Stoneman Douglass School shooting. You do not have to participate in this study. You may not receive any direct benefit from this study. The knowledge gained from this study may eventually benefit others. Should you experience any discomforts through your participation in this study, the following national counseling services are available:

1. National Mental Health Crisis Hotline at 1-800-273-8255. Trained crisis workers are available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Your confidential and toll-free call goes

to the nearest crisis center in the Lifeline national network. These centers provide crisis counseling and mental health referrals

2. SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-487-4889, is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service, in English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. This service provides referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations. Callers can also order free publications and other information
3. To find local treatment you can visit <https://findtreatment.gov/> or call 1-800-622-4357.
4. You can also visit your campus Mental Health Support Office.
 - a. The [redacted for confidentiality] Counseling and Mental Health Services Hotline is XXX-XXX-XXXX and is available to students 24/7.
 - b. You may make an on-campus appointment or find a local counselor at this website – [redacted for confidentiality]

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. Refusal to participate or withdrawal will involve no penalty to you. In the event new information becomes available that may affect your willingness to participate in this study, this information will be given to you so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to continue your participation.

This research project could be beneficial in understanding the stories of Marjory Stoneman Douglas School shooting survivors as they navigate college. Should you have any questions about this letter or the research project, please contact me at (412) 260-0738 or by e-mail at jmp0083@mix.wvu.edu.

Thank you for your time and help with this project.

Sincerely,

Jayne Piskorik

Ph.D. Candidate, West Virginia University

APPENDIX B

Research Instrument – Interview One

Disclosure - Thank you for meeting with me, today's interview will focus on your memories of transitioning from high school to college and your college experience. Please ask for clarification if you are unsure of any questions. If you, for any reason, do not want to answer a question, let me know and we will move on to the next question. For accuracy, this interview will be recorded via Zoom and should take no longer than an hour.

To better understand your transition to college I would like to start with learning about your high school experience.

1. Please give me a broad overview of your high school experience.
 - a. Can you tell me about the environment? This could be the physical school buildings or the town.
 - b. Who were important people during this time?
 - c. What were some of your goals or biggest desires during high school?
 - d. What memories stand out from high school?
2. Tell me a little bit about your transition from high school to college. We will define this transition time beginning when you chose your college to the first month on campus.
 - a. How did you decide what college you wanted to attend?
 - i. Did surviving a school shooting influence your college choice, and if so, how?
 - ii. What safety considerations played a role in your college choice?
 - b. What emotions were you experiencing before your transition to college?
 - c. Who influenced you or supported you as you made these decisions?
 - d. Who supported you and eased your transition to college?

- e. Who or what made the transition more difficult?
 - f. What memories from this transition time stand out?
3. How did it feel being a college student in a new environment after that first month?
- a. Who are important people during your college experience?
 - i. Friends, faculty, staff that enrich your college experience
 - b. What experiences were important during your college career?
 - c. How did surviving a school shooting influence your college career?
 - i. How does surviving a school shooting influence your involvement or experiences in college?
 - ii. Is surviving a school shooting a common topic of conversation?
 - iii. What safety concerns were present while on campus?
 - d. What are important memories that stand out from college?
4. What are your graduation plans?
- a. Are you graduating on time for your program?
 - i. If not – what are elements that added extra time to your studies?
 - b. What are your biggest goals post-graduation?
 - c. Is location important – would you stay in/return to Florida?
 - d. Has surviving a school shooting influenced your career trajectory? If so, how?
5. Are there any important elements of your college transition or experience that I have missed?

APPENDIX C

Research Instrument – Interview Two

Disclosure - Thank you for meeting with me, today's interview will focus on your memories of transitioning from high school to college and your college experience. Please ask for clarification if you are unsure of any questions. If you, for any reason, do not want to answer a question, let me know and we will move on to the next question. For accuracy, this interview will be recorded via Zoom and should take no longer than an hour.

Our time together today will review the three artifacts I asked you to choose and share with me. One representing your high school experiences, one representing your transition to college, one representing your college experiences, and one representing what you hope for in your future after college.

1. What artifact have you chosen to represent your high school experience?
 - a. Would you describe it to me?
 - b. When did you receive this item/take the picture/write the poem?
 - c. Why is it significant?
 - d. What does it mean to you?
 - e. How does it represent high school to you?
2. What artifact have you chosen to represent your transition to college?
 - a. Would you describe it to me?
 - b. When did you receive this item/take the picture/write the poem?
 - c. Why is it significant?
 - d. What does it mean to you?
 - e. How does it represent your transition?
3. What artifact have you chosen to represent your college experience?
 - a. Would you describe it to me?
 - b. When did you receive this item/take the picture/write the poem?

- c. Why is it significant?
 - d. What does it mean to you?
 - e. How does it represent college to you?
5. What emotions did reviewing these artifacts uncover?
 - a. What memories are most salient?
 - b. Who is most prevalent in memories attached to these artifacts?
6. How did the artifacts illustrate growth or change throughout your narrative?
7. Is there anything else I should consider about these artifacts when trying to construct a narrative about your transition and college experiences as a Parkland shooting survivor?