

THE  
**Catalyst**  
at UC San Diego

WHAT DOES COMPASSION MEAN  
TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY OF  
SAN DIEGO?

NKECHINYERE  
IROANUSI  
ET AL

CLIMATE REFUGEES AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY

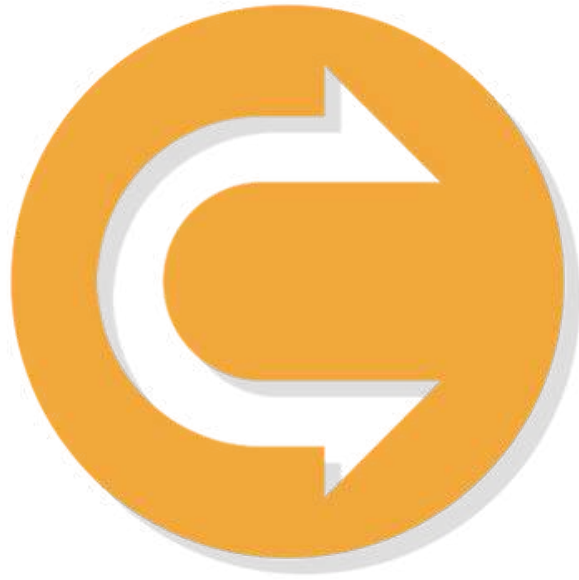
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QUEER IMMERSION IN PERSONA 4  
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THE  
**Catalyst**  
at UC San Diego

**VOLUME 1**  
JUNE 2022

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# Letter from Editor in Chief



During the Summer of 2021, Dr. Sophia Tsai-Neri, a UCSD Summer Research Program coordinator, made it apparent to a few of us students that there was an absence in the space providing resources for undergraduate student researchers to publish. Many students engaging in the Summer Research Program cohorts at UC San Diego were making fantastic discoveries in various academic domains, and much of this work remained unused after final reports were written and submitted for the programs. Following Dr. Tsai-Neri's suggestion, we revitalized an old student paper series with the intent to improve publication accessibility for undergraduate researchers at UC San Diego.

This project quickly became more ambitious than expected. In particular, we wanted our organization to embody and reflect the unique, interdisciplinary scientific approaches prolific at the university. We favored an approach which allowed any student to submit their paper for publication, provided they were willing to dedicate the time and effort to see their work to fruition. Editors were brought on board, and we permitted students to submit and revise their writing under the guidance of graduate students before final publication. We sought participation from students and editors across every discipline the school had to offer, from the Physical Sciences to Queer Studies, and we were rewarded with some truly unique final products. Through this volume (and hopefully many more), we endeavour to enhance people's preconceptions of what quality undergraduate research can resemble by highlighting the work of these talented individuals. Through this process, we hope to be the Catalyst that propels their careers forward, and that inspires motivation and constructive change in many others.

Finally, I would like to recognize the incredibly talented, hardworking, and faithful executive board of The Catalyst for keeping this dream alive. Nobody pretends academic research is easy because everybody knows it is so damn challenging. I believe it is passion, as well as the love of knowledge, that drives researchers to commit so much of their life to their craft (and often for so little compensation!). Likewise, I prefer to think of The Catalyst as a passion project. Within the hands of passionate students, it shall continue to live, grow, and celebrate the knowledge contributed by others.

Thank you for your time, and enjoy the work featured herein!

Sincerely,  
Luke Sztajnkrzyca,  
Editor-in-Chief of The Catalyst at UC San Diego, 2021-2023



AUTHOR FEATURE

# Nkechinyere Iroanusi



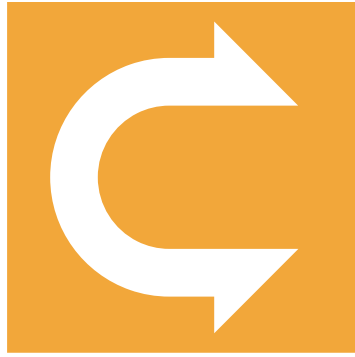
NKECHINYERE  
IROANUSI  
FOURTH YEAR

HUMAN BIOLOGY  
MAJOR

GLOBAL HEALTH  
MINOR

My name is Nkechinyere Iroanusi and I am a current Master's Student in the School of Biological Sciences here at UCSD, and my research focuses on how to teach students about biology and genetics without fostering racist ideals. My other research interests include the social determinants of health and the effects of racial prejudice in medicine. My future goal is to become a medical doctor to serve the underrepresented and under-resourced communities of color.

However, when I'm not in school or doing research, I enjoy various hobbies like reading, knitting, and hanging out with my friends. my hobbies of reading, knitting, watching movies, and going for walks.



THE  
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# What Does Compassion Mean to the Black Community of San Diego?

*by Nkechinyere Iroanusi, Dr. Suzanne Afflalo, Wendy Shurelds, Alyssa Clayton, Shelby Warren, and Dr. Elaine Tanaka*  
*edited by Granton Jindal*  
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# What Does Compassion Mean to the Black Community of San Diego?

Nkechinyere Iroanusi

Dr. Suzanne Afflalo

Wendy Shurelds

Alyssa Clayton

Shelby Warren

Dr. Elaine Tanaka

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## Abstract

Due to many historical injustices, communities of color have often felt misused by medicine at large. There is a cycle of distrust and general unpleasantness with healthcare providers. Unfortunately, the injustices haven't stopped, as many people of color feel that those in the medical profession lack one of the basic qualities that are needed in healthcare: compassion. In many research studies about compassion, healthcare professionals and other experts define compassion. However, the people we should be asking are not the providers themselves, but the patients, as they are the ones that will know if they receive compassionate care. Focusing research like this on communities of color, especially since there is already distrust, is important. Although research on compassion has increased, there is little data on how under-resourced, culturally, and ethnically diverse communities define compassion, which can help mitigate the health disparities plaguing these communities. This study will help delineate how compassionate the healthcare industry is, and if it is not, what work can be done to make it more compassionate. A purposely made survey was created with a focus group of Black community leaders, non-profit founders, and physicians from San Diego. This survey is composed of questions that target experiences and attitudes towards physicians and healthcare providers for people from the Black community to expand on. Therefore, the Black community, across all socioeconomic groups, can be directly asked what compassion personally means to them, allowing us to finally understand 'What Does Compassion Mean to the Black Community of San Diego?'

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## Introduction

Compassion is the standard of care and the foundation of medical practice. It has been shown that compassion in a patient and provider relationship is beneficial, as it improves patient satisfaction (Nápoles et al., 2009), leads to faster recovery for patients (Sinclair, Norris et al., 2016), and helps with the discussion of sensitive health-related topics between patient and doctor (Lori et al., 2010). Although compassion is important in improving healthcare, there has been little research done on it from the perspective of the patients and their expectations of their healthcare providers (Sinclair, Norris et al., 2016). Instead, the definition of compassion as related to the healthcare profession has been defined more by the words empathy and sympathy, or the term will be used without any clear definition (Singh et al., 2018).

As research on compassion increases, a difference has been seen through the ways that the providers and patients perceive compassion (Sinclair, Mcclement et al., 2016), especially how underserved, culturally diverse, minority populations define compassion (Singh et al., 2018). This leads to the continued distrust between these populations and the healthcare industry, specifically with African-American communities. With the knowledge of many past historical and personal experiences with healthcare, many African-Americans feel a sense of mistrust and distance between themselves and their healthcare providers (Kennedy et al., 2007). To understand and shape the way compassion is received and valued by patients, especially those in diverse communities, a certain metric or toolkit on compassion must be created that addresses and enforces compassionate care in the way these communities define it.

There has been a recent effort to further the understanding of compassion in diverse populations. A research study conducted by palliative care specialists in Calgary, Canada led to the first patient-derived, clinically applicable model for understanding compassion in 2018. Named the Patient Compassion Model (PCM), this tool was developed by collecting qualitative interview data from patients within a palliative care unit, and then the grounded theory approach was utilized to identify recurring themes. Though this research is limited by the advanced cancer patient population in the palliative care unit, the model was later successfully generalized and transferred to other palliative patient populations. The research findings suggest that the PCM may be generalized and transferable to other unstudied patient populations and may even be used to inform education and research (Sinclair, Jaggi et al., 2018).

Although debate exists on the teachability of compassion (Bray et al., 2013), there is evidence to support that the development of compassion can be taught in medical education settings, as seen through the Jefferson Scale of Empathy (JSE). The JSE was developed in order to measure the empathy of health professionals. This 20 question assessment tool relies on ‘Compassionate Care’ as one of its three measures of empathy, however here compassion is defined as ‘sympathy combined with the desire to help,’ a definition determined by foundational surveys administered to physicians and not patients (Hojat et al., 2001). A 2008 pharmacy school study showed that pharmacy students who underwent structured patient empathy training had improved JSE scores after training, however, statistical significance was not determined due to the small sample size (Chen et al., 2008). Although these two past studies and testing metrics were created and used, there continues to be a lack of research on compassion-related health professional curriculum interventions in general, let alone in underserved and diverse communities.

It is important that continued research efforts to understand compassion from the perspective of diverse, underserved communities is done through the lens of cultural humility. ‘Cultural humility,’ as opposed to cultural competency, is a non-paternalistic and mutually beneficial approach to readdressing power imbalances in the patient-physician relationship by ensuring that health care providers commit to life-long learning and persistent self-critique. This outlook is especially relevant for cross-cultural care relationships. As importantly inferred by the researchers who defined cultural humility, “Experiencing with the community the factors at play in defining health priorities, research activities, and community-informed advocacy activities requires that the physician trainee recognize that foci of expertise with regard to health can indeed reside outside of the academic medical center and even outside of the practice of Western medicine” (Tervalon et al., 1998) Between the months of June and August of 2021, time was dedicated to determine what compassion means to the average black individual in San Diego and what providers can do to ensure that compassion is given to their patients.

## Methods

After obtaining approval for the study from the Institutional Review Board, a focus group composed of Black community leaders, non-profit leaders, and physicians was created to ensure that the entire study process was welcoming and not offensive to Black individuals at large. This required having conversations on where the medical community has gone wrong towards the Black community and expectations of the outcome of this study. After gathering sufficient information and guidance from the focus group, a survey to determine what compassion means to this community, The Compassion Survey, was made using Qualtrics. The survey contained 33 questions to gather insight about the participants’ experiences with medicine and understanding what compassion means to them, including characteristics of compassionate people and feelings on the culture of medicine and how it relates to Black individuals. Once finalized, the survey was distributed to relevant participants through in-person and virtual administration. For the in-person administration, participants were chosen from various outdoor events in San Diego, such as the monthly Community Health & Resource Fair at the Jackie Robinson YMCA. Once the survey was completed, participants were given a \$10 Amazon gift card and the option to enter in a gift basket raffle as a token of gratitude and compensation for their time.

## Results

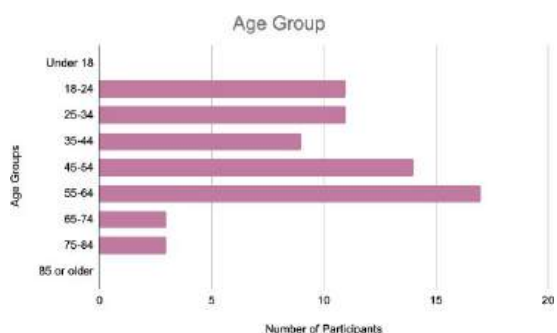


Figure 1: Breakdown of Participants by Age Group

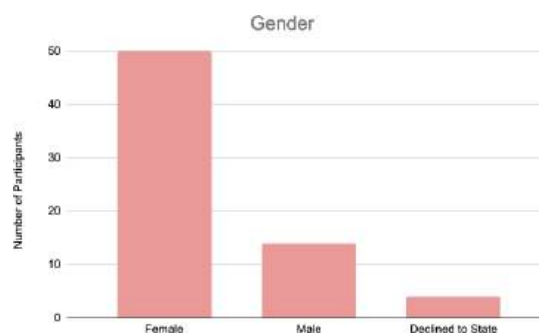


Figure 2: Breakdown of Participants by Gender

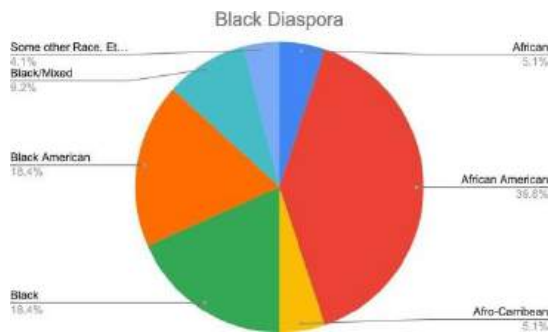


Figure 3: Participants self-identification within the Black Diaspora

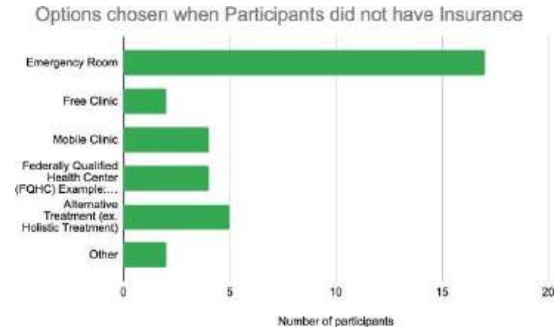


Figure 6: Chosen healthcare options when participants did not have insurance

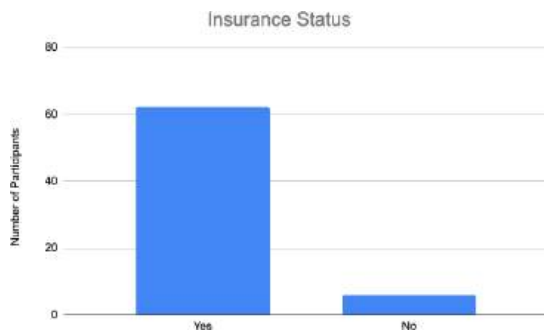


Figure 4: Participant Insurance Status

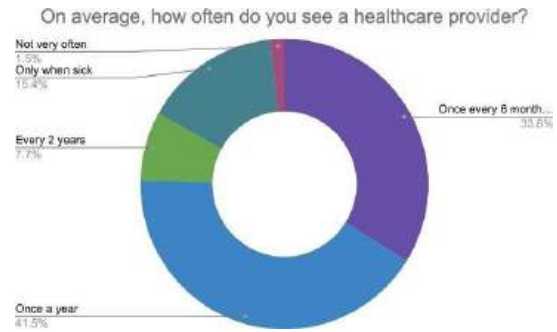


Figure 7: How often survey participants saw their healthcare providers

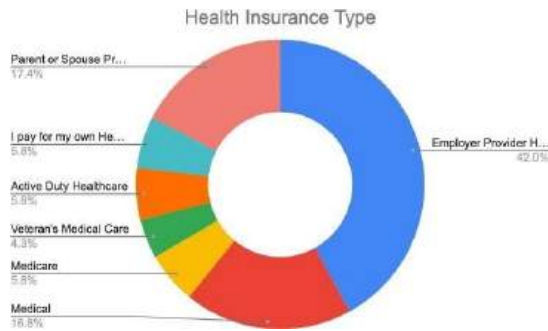


Figure 5: Breakdown of Participants by Type of Healthcare Insurance

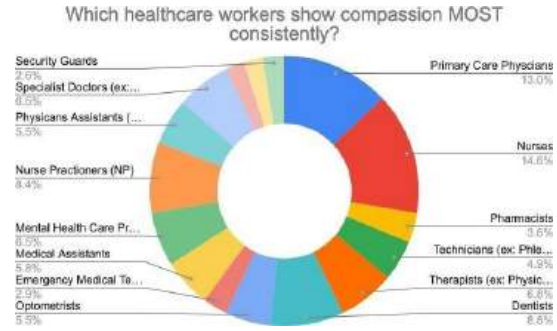


Figure 8: Healthcare workers that show the most consistent compassion towards survey participants

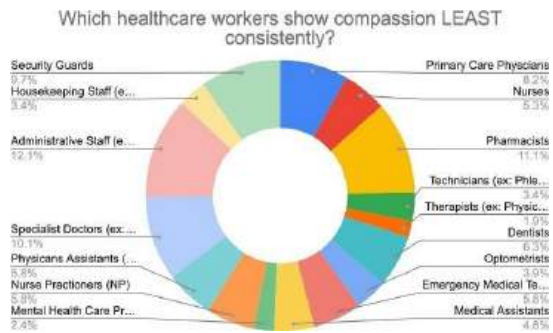


Figure 9: Healthcare workers that show the least consistent compassion towards survey participants

What would you describe your worst healthcare experience as?

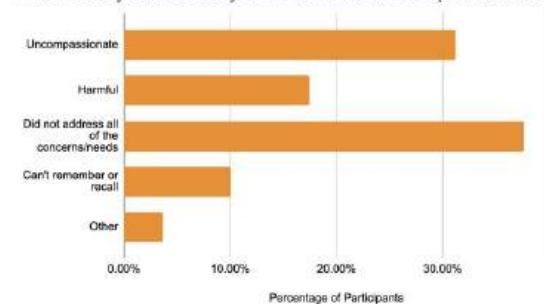


Figure 10: Survey participant descriptions of worst healthcare experience

What would you describe your best healthcare experience as?

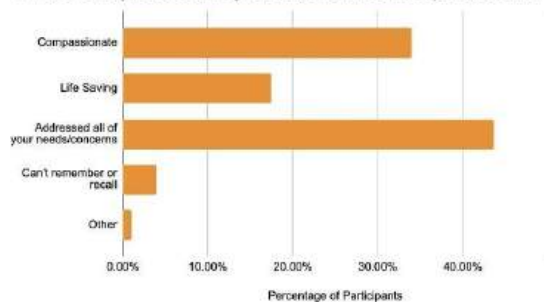


Figure 11: Survey participant descriptions of best healthcare experience

Studies show that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have a big impact on long term health. Prior to your 18th birthday did you witness or personally experience any of the following in the household?

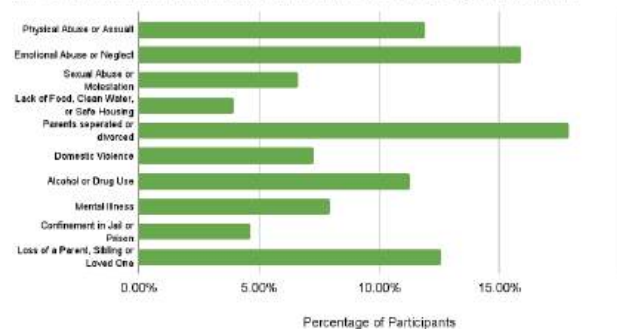


Figure 12: Percentage of survey participants that suffered varying adverse childhood experiences prior to their 18th birthday

Strongly Agree that more Compassion would be in Medicine if Black people were thought of as a Worthy Group to Serve

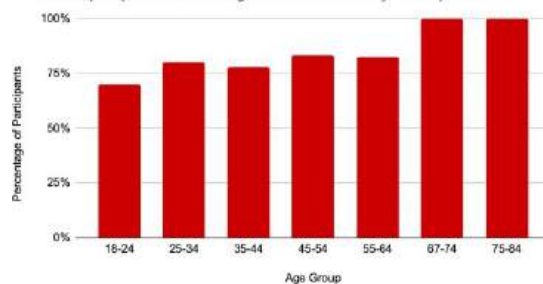


Figure 13: Age breakdown of survey participants that strongly agree that there would be more compassion in medicine if Black patients were thought of as a worthy group to serve

Experienced Inappropriate Behavior by Healthcare Provider

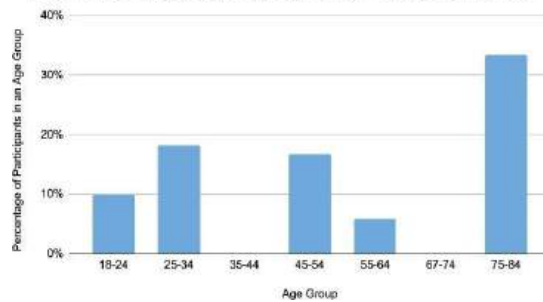


Figure 14: Age breakdown of survey participants that experienced inappropriate behavior by a healthcare provider (ex. Inappropriate suggesting or touching)

Trust their healthcare provider	76.6%
Receive routine physical exams	75.41%
Percentage of the time that participants were treated fairly by their providers	63.1%
Experienced inappropriate behavior by healthcare providers	11.1%
Providers never or rarely took the time to get to know or understand the barriers facing a community	64.7%
Believe that compassion is lacking due to providers not believing that they are a worthy group to serve	81.0%

Table 1: Summary of Responses about Healthcare

Percentage that expect compassion from healthcare providers	98.41%
Percentage of participants that had health providers show compassion to get know participants' adverse experiences	76.41%
Strongly believe that there would be more compassion if there were providers that looked like them	66.2%
Strongly believe that to be considered compassionate, providers must acknowledge and understand the professional and systemic racism in medicine	64.1%
Strongly/Somewhat/Neutral agreement that compassion can be learned in an academic setting	81.3%
Somewhat/strongly believe that compassion can be learned through life experience	92.3%

Table 2: Summary of Responses about Compassion

Kindness	100%
Empathy	100%
Willingness to Help	89.7%
Warmth	86.8%
Sympathy	64.7%
Resolve	55.9%
Wisdom	52.9%
Perseverance	48.5%
Pity	16.2%

Table 3: Characteristics of Compassion: Percentage of Participants Answering 'Yes'

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Makes direct eye contact	61.90%	38.10%	0.00%
Shows understanding of my culture	24.62%	56.92%	18.46%
Shows respect for my culture	39.06%	48.44%	12.50%
(Pre-COVID) Offers handshake	47.69%	30.77%	21.54%
Empowers me with knowledge	67.69%	24.62%	7.69%
Withholds knowledge about my health from me	6.15%	26.15%	67.69%
Listens to me	63.08%	35.38%	1.54%
Confirms what I said correct	43.75%	46.88%	9.38%
Gives me their undivided attention	69.23%	27.69%	3.08%
Refers to me with formal titles (Ex: Mr., Mrs., Ms., etc.)	43.08%	38.46%	18.46%
Offers alternative care (Ex: Holistic medicine, meditation, acupuncture, etc.)	27.69%	27.69%	44.62%
Makes conversation or small talk	43.08%	52.31%	4.62%
Shows interest in my personal life	23.08%	53.85%	23.08%
Shares information about their personal life	12.31%	44.62%	43.08%
Addresses all of my questions and concerns	56.25%	40.63%	3.13%
Rushes me	18.75%	31.25%	50.00%
Remembers me at the next visit	56.25%	39.06%	4.69%
Presents all my health care options	43.75%	42.19%	14.06%
Demonstrates warm-heartedness	45.31%	46.88%	7.81%
Shows trustworthiness	54.69%	43.75%	1.56%
Shows common courtesy	68.75%	31.25%	0.00%
Demonstrates open-mindedness (receptive to new people or new ideas)	32.81%	59.38%	7.81%
Makes assumptions about me	12.70%	47.62%	39.68%
Recognizes that I am the most knowledgeable about my body	34.92%	44.44%	20.63%

Table 4: Summary on provider mannerisms when meeting patients



## Discussion

During the administration of The Compassion Survey between the months of June and August, a total of 68 participants took part in the survey process. Up until July 12th, 2021, the online software Docusign or verbal consent was used to have participants read the informed consent document and enter the gift basket raffle until the informed consent document was incorporated into the Compassion Survey. Additionally, only participants who were above the age of 18 and who self-identified as part of the black community or part of the Black Diaspora were allowed to complete the survey. Figures 1-7 provide a demographic insight into the survey participants, identifying the breakdown of the group's age, gender, self-identification within the Black Diaspora, insurance status, chosen healthcare options if participants didn't have insurance, and how often participants saw their healthcare providers.

Participants indicated that nurses are the group of healthcare providers that show the most consistent compassion (Figure 8), while pharmacists showed the least consistent compassion (Figure 9).

From Tables 1 and 2, it is apparent that many black individuals believe that compassion is lacking due to providers never taking the time to understand the barriers facing their community or even creating an environment for their patients to feel that they are individuals who are worthy to serve. Many in opposition to the enforcement of compassionate care curriculum in healthcare learning institutions say that communities of color were victims of racism before but with antiracist education and rhetoric becoming more prevalent in all aspects of life, it should no longer be apparent in current times. However, this is far from true. As seen in Figures 13 and 14, participants across all age groups - even those that are 18 years old - have experienced inappropriate behavior and inadequate levels of worthiness at one time from their providers. This is even more disheartening when at many times, these participants probably needed the compassion and care from their providers as they experienced things like physical abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence and other adverse childhood experiences before the age of 18, as shown in Figure 12.

This is most likely due to the fact that the medical community has not done the work to fully address and make changes to the racist environment in medicine. Survey participants indicated that providers would be more compassionate if they addressed and understood the professional and systemic racism in medicine (Table 2). In some medical schools, there is only "one lecture during medical school on health disparities, and just one unsurprisingly uncomfortable reflective practice session on the topic of racism" (Tervalon et al., 1998). As seen by data from the Compassion Survey, that kind of education is not enough to change the culture of medicine, as it does not help providers be as compassionate and understanding as they need to. However, instead, the curriculum should be more in-depth to educate providers about structural racism and implicit bias while promoting antiracist behaviors. From the data, it can be seen that many patients view a successful healthcare experience as one that is able to address all their concerns and needs while also showing compassionate mannerisms (Figures 10 and 11). It should also incorporate additional characteristics of compassion such as 'kindness', 'empathy', 'willingness to help' and 'warmth' while making sure to shy away from the act of pitying black patients as that is not viewed as a compassionate act (Table 3), which can be embodied by the positive

mannerisms that are identified in Table 4. This, in combination with the continued advocacy of compassionate care, will hopefully lead to rebuilding the trust between the healthcare system and communities of color.

While continued advocacy is necessary, compassion curriculum in medical education should be added as well. Although compassion is an important quality for admissions to medical school (Sinclair, Hack et al., 2018), medical students could potentially lose some of the compassionate traits and tendencies throughout the four rigorous years of medical school and the years of residency and fellowship after. Since survey participants believe that compassion can be learned in an academic setting, the most comprehensive compassion curriculum would also include education on the personal and systemic racism in medicine along with understanding the challenges or barriers that burden communities of color. An ideal curriculum would also include a way to measure the increase in compassion levels throughout the whole process, which might possibly be used in conjunction with the Jefferson Scale of Empathy. Once the acknowledgment and work are done to make healthcare workers more compassionate, especially with communities of color, it can be a step in the right direction to give patients the best experience with their providers as they can.

### **Future Research**

In the future, a longer period of time will be needed to perform additional data collection, especially for other communities of color and possibly to other areas of California. Most of the data collection was done between the months of June-August 2021 and the survey was solely administered in San Diego. However, to gather more input from different communities about what compassion means to them the survey will need to be extended to different regions and communities to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of compassion. Additionally, since there was a small number of participants, there was not enough data to perform meaningful, detailed statistical analysis to determine the significance of varying factors that were studied.

### **Conclusion**

While there is still work to be done to fully understand what compassion means to the black community and other communities of color, we have at least have a better understanding of what it means and how providers can take the steps to ensure that their patients have compassionate experiences. With interspersed compassion trainings throughout the time these providers are receiving their respective health career training, that highlight the importance of understanding personal and systemic racism that is in medicine, we can be sure that patients and their experiences continue to remain at the forefront of these providers' minds, hopefully leading to the rebuilding of trust between medicine and communities of colors.

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AUTHOR FEATURE

# Katrina Wanner

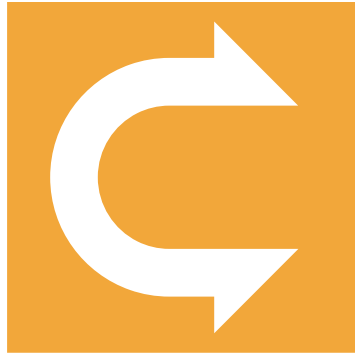


KATRINA  
WANNER  
THIRD YEAR

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
*ANTHROPOLOGY, POLITICAL  
SCIENCE, DATA ANALYTICS*  
MAJOR

HUMAN RIGHTS AND  
MIGRATION  
MINOR

My name is Katrina Wanner and I'm a 3rd year in ERC. I'm double majoring in International Studies - Anthropology and Political Science - Data Analytics with a minor in Human Rights and Migration. I generally research refugee crises and human trafficking, and I'm interested in how top-down international institutions meet bottom-up activism for the protection of human rights. My career goals are to attend graduate school and then work for an NGO or nonprofit related to the support of refugees. Some fun facts about me are that I'm from Pennsylvania and I love going for hikes and running.



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at UC San Diego

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## **Climate Refugees and Accountability**

*by Katrina Wanner*  
*edited by Viktoria Steck*  
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# Climate Refugees and Accountability

Katrina Wanner

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## **Abstract**

The adverse effects of climate change are destroying communities. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and changing weather patterns are drastically threatening the living conditions and the livelihoods of people globally, forcing them to flee their homes and become “climate refugees.” Although there are many contributors to the perpetuation of climate change, including governments, corporations and individuals, this research focuses on the role of multinational enterprises, some of whom are large carbon emitters. Should they be held accountable for their direct and slow-onset contributions to the displacement of people, and if so, to what extent?

This project analyzes the current accountability mechanisms as outlined in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises to determine whether these guidelines are effective, and where they suggest responsibility should fall. Climate activists as well as non-climate activists were interviewed in order to analyze their interpretations of the current guidelines and their views on corporate responsibility. This determined what changes should be made to the guidelines, if any, and why accountability for climate related displacement is so contentious. As climate change becomes an increasingly urgent issue with more and more people displaced, public opinion will play a substantial role in protecting the rights of climate refugees and in determining whether the existing guidelines are effective.

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## Introduction

The adverse effects of climate change are destroying communities. Changes in the environment can cause climate induced migration in many forms, forcing people to flee their homes and become “climate refugees.” For example, wildfires have been increasingly prevalent in the Pacific Northwest and California which has led agricultural communities to face hardship as a result of soil erosion and loss of soil fertility. Water pollution occurs globally and contaminates fresh water sources that communities depend upon for drinking and cooking. Desertification, which is common in Africa’s Sahel region, has created a lack of vegetation and loss of arable land (Broswimmer, 2002). Most importantly, rising sea levels have devastated many low-lying countries through flooding, and will continue to impact many coastal communities around the world (OECD, 2020). While there are many ways in which climate change contributes to the displacement of people, these environmental phenomena often function as threat multipliers meaning that they amplify the already existing hardships communities face. Often, the regions most detrimentally affected by climate change are those with fewer resources and are exploited by large corporations that operate transnationally. Large scale enterprises are known to not only “pursue profits in low-wage markets but also seek to escape the tighter regulatory frameworks of the global North, thus greatly accelerating the destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity in the global South” (Broswimmer, 2002). By evading regulatory frameworks, multinational enterprises are able to increase their greenhouse gas emissions and avoid climate sensitive regulations. Many companies utilize fossil fuels, generate toxic waste and create deforestation in communities to maximize profits. The result of these actions is that communities are forced to face the consequences of these actions such as displacement from sea level rise, poor air quality, and the contamination of water sources. As a result, many vulnerable communities in the global South are affected strongly by global warming’s effects and the actions of multinational corporations.

Under international law, people displaced from climate change are currently not protected as refugees, so being displaced from climate change is not currently an accepted qualification for refugee status. As defined in Article 1 Section A of the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, refugees are people who are outside their country of nationality “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UN General Assembly, 1951). As a result, “climate refugees” are not officially recognized by the UN under international law, but for the purposes of this project I will refer to “climate refugees” synonymously with “people displaced from climate change,” and “climate-induced migrants.”

Assigning responsibility for climate induced migration is difficult considering that various actors perpetuate climate change. Such actors include individuals, governments, states, nations, and enterprises. The scope of this research focuses mainly on the environmental impacts of multinational enterprises. These transnational corporations currently have little environmental accountability leaving climate refugees particularly vulnerable and susceptible to human rights violations (Broswimmer, 2002). This led to the research question: to what extent should multinational enterprises be held accountable for their direct and slow-onset contributions to climate-induced migration? Slow-onset effects include gradual sea level rise, global warming and other long-term climatic changes. To answer this question, a literature review examines current international mechanisms and determines how to effectively protect the rights of climate refugees. Additionally, people’s perceptions on the role of enterprises in the displacement of people were

analyzed. The result of this analysis was that all participants found multinational enterprises should be held accountable for their contributions to climate change and the displacement of people. This accountability should be enforced through a combination of international regulations and incentives.

## **Research Methods**

This research was gathered through semi-structured interviews with fourteen individuals. Seven of the interviewees were climate activists, and seven were non-climate activists. In this case, a climate activist is defined as a person who is involved with a climate action organization. The semi-structured interviews consisted of the same questions being asked to each participant, but allowed for conversational elements such as follow-up questions specific to each interview. The goal of these interviews was to gather a wide variety of perspectives on what protections should be extended to climate refugees, and the role that multinational enterprises play in perpetuating displacement.

This sample of interviewees was gathered on a volunteer basis, and participants were contacted based on their involvement with various organizations. Twelve of the interviewees were either students at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) located in La Jolla, California or students at the Pennsylvania State University (PSU) located in State College, Pennsylvania and were involved with student organizations. Some examples of the clubs students were involved in include the College Democrats, College Republicans, Collegiate Farm Bureau, Agribusiness Management Club, the Sustainability Collective, and the Sustainable Leadership Council. One participant was a professor involved in climate justice campaigns, and another interviewee was a local farm owner in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

The interview questions asked pertained to their opinions on climate change, the displacement of people, and the efficacy of international mechanisms that regulate human rights protections and sustainability within multinational enterprises. Specifically, the OECD *Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* were referenced as an example of a soft law instrument that provides regulatory advice for multinational corporations.

## **Role of Multinational Enterprises and International Regulations**

With the prevalence of capitalism and rise of neoliberalism, more power and influence has been placed in the hands of multinational enterprises. This is because “many mega-corporations command more economic power than do the majority of states, and they dominate the political processes of nearly all states” (Broszmitter, 2002). The development of technology and globalization has thus enabled enterprises to operate transnationally and to become a major international actor. This allows them to produce and distribute products for maximum profit. As a result, profit is often prioritized at the expense of the environment. According to *The Guardian*, 100 companies have sourced more than 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions since 1988 (Riley, 2017). Over time, the environmental impact of these corporations has grown dramatically as they operate on larger scales. The fact that relatively few corporations are responsible for such a vast amount of greenhouse gas emissions shows that with proper regulation these emissions may be feasible to manage. Other scholars have noted that “of the world’s 100 largest economic systems, 47 are corporations, each with more wealth than any of 130 countries. Indeed, only 17 countries

can boast a higher GDP than General Motors” (Broswimmer, 2002). This illustrates the vast amount of wealth that some multinational corporations have. Only a handful of enterprises each produce more wealth than one hundred thirty of the world’s one-hundred ninety-five countries. In sum, not only do these corporations contribute significantly to the climate crisis, but they also have exorbitant amounts of wealth that could be used towards minimizing the future detriments of their practices.

The substantial wealth acquired by multinational enterprises yields power and political influence which can make regulating these corporations extremely difficult. Currently, there are no legally binding international regulations for transnational corporations (Duruigbo, 2008). There are national and regional laws that may be implemented to regulate the emissions of corporations operating within states, but “multilateral treaties generally impose obligations on *states*, not on *companies*” (Kamminga, 2004). Given that the burden is on the state, when these regulations are implemented corporations often change their production location or outsource to states where there are less regulations. This leads enterprises to adopt a transnational and hierarchical structure that disperses accountability, and widens their sphere of influence. Some nations may be able to effectively pass regulations for the carbon emissions of multinational corporations, but other states may either be unwilling or unable to do so (Kamminga, 2004). In countries where there is weak governance, corporations may already have significant influence over national politics and prevent new legislation from being implemented. In other instances, states may be unwilling to pass new regulations given that the business of multinational enterprises makes the state economy more competitive in the global and local markets.

The lack of internationally binding regulations for multinational enterprises is a problem seeing as while corporations are growing in size and wealth, their environmental impact is increasing. This is because the growth of multinational enterprises “relies heavily on energy-intensive, capital-intensive technology, leading to a more rapid depletion of high-quality energy sources and other natural resources, and to ever larger amounts of waste being dumped into the environment” (Broswimmer, 2002). This illustrates the need for strict regulatory processes, but passing hard laws can be difficult because “in the case of activities which are part of economically beneficial processes, prohibition may be politically and economically impractical” (Teclaff, 1994). As a result, there has been a reliance on soft law instruments to regulate the environmental impacts of multinational enterprises which consist of non-legally binding instruments such as guidelines and declarations.

One example of a soft law instrument is the *Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* provided by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD is an international organization with thirty-eight member states including Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. The *Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* only apply to corporations operating within those thirty eight member countries. These non-binding standards are thus not implemented across the world. The guidelines serve as a list of recommendations for the sustainable business practices that corporations should implement (Rubin et al., 1976). The *Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* also describe expectations relating to human rights, employment, environment, bribery, consumer

interests, science and technology, competition and taxation. For the purposes of this project, this research focuses primarily on the guidelines pertaining to the environmental and human rights expectations for corporations. One example of an OECD guideline is Article 6 which states:

Multinational enterprises should continually improve corporate environmental performance, at the level of the enterprise and of its supply chain, by encouraging:

- a) adoption of technologies and operating procedures that reflect standards concerning environmental performance;
- b) development of products or services that have no undue environmental impacts; are safe in their intended use; reduce greenhouse gas emissions; are efficient in their consumption of energy and natural resources; can be reused, recycled, or disposed of safely;
- c) promoting higher levels of awareness among customers of the environmental implications of using the products and services of the enterprise by providing accurate information on their products; and
- d) exploring and assessing ways of improving the environmental performance of the enterprise over the longer term, for instance by developing strategies for emission reduction, or efficient resource utilisation and recycling (OECD, 2011).

For this research interviews were conducted to determine public opinion on these issues and the efficacy of the OECD guidelines. The interviewees were provided information about the OECD and Article 6 was specifically discussed as an example of an international regulatory mechanism.

## **Interviews**

In order to assess public perception regarding corporate accountability for climate change and the displacement of people, both climate activists as well as non-climate activists were interviewed. Their opinions and experiences with climate induced displacement and their thoughts on the OECD guidelines were discussed.

To assess the knowledge level of the people being interviewed, the participants were asked how well informed they considered themselves on climate issues. Six people considered themselves to be an 8/10 on a scale from 1 (not very well informed) to 10 (very well informed). Five people ranked themselves a 7/10 or below, while two considered themselves a 9/10 or above. Their responses establish how their knowledge may affect their opinions on climate induced displacement. Figure 1 illustrates their responses.

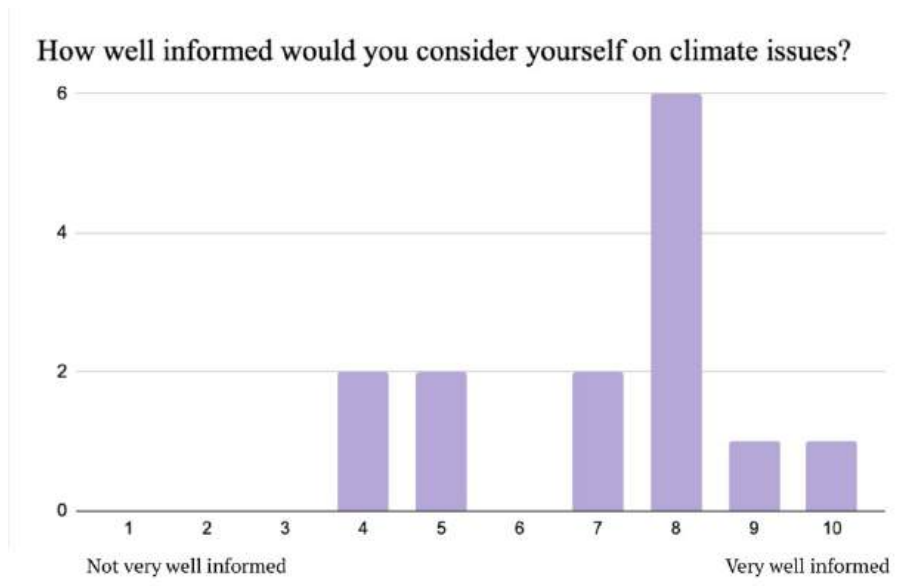


Figure 1: Responses to the question “How well informed would you consider yourself on climate issues?”

After assessing their knowledge level, participants were asked how urgent they consider climate change. Given that half of the participants were non-climate activists, variations in the responses were expected. Regardless of political opinion, the interviewees considered climate change an extremely urgent issue with nine participants rating the urgency at a 10/10.

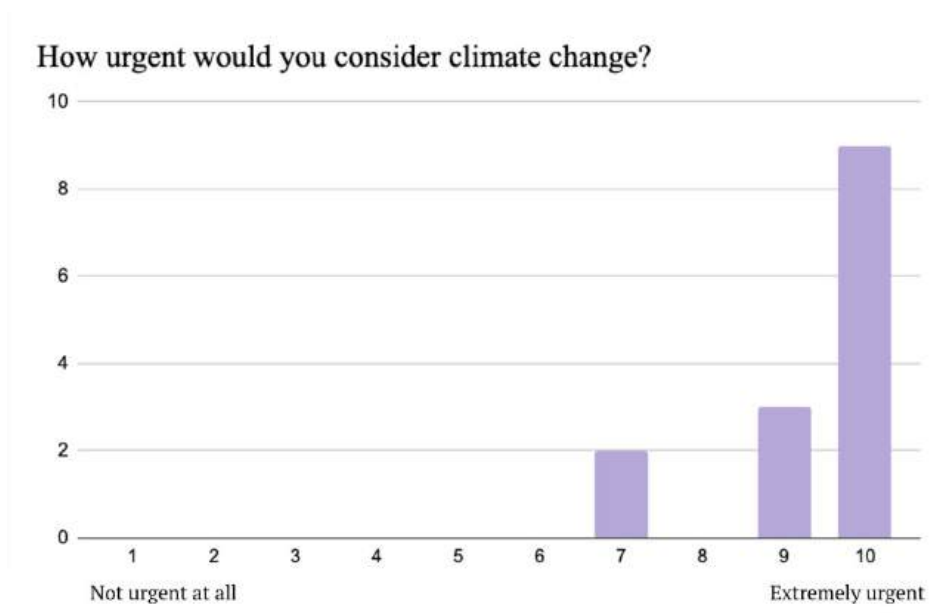


Figure 2: Responses to the question “How urgent would you consider climate change?”



Then, the topic of climate refugees was discussed and the ways that people become displaced from climate change. In all interviews, the participants recognized that climate induced migration will become an increasingly prevalent problem if there is little effort to combat climate change. Many respondents had already experienced some form of climate induced displacement themselves or among people they know from natural disasters. This led to the question of how urgent they considered the displacement of people from climate change. Most respondents ranked climate induced migration as an urgent issue, but slightly less pressing in comparison to climate change as a whole. The perception of climate migration as less urgent was due to respondents thinking it is not an imminent problem, but that in the future it will become more important. Some outliers ranked climate induced migration as not urgent at all based on their experiences within their own community where they are relatively unaffected by climate change.

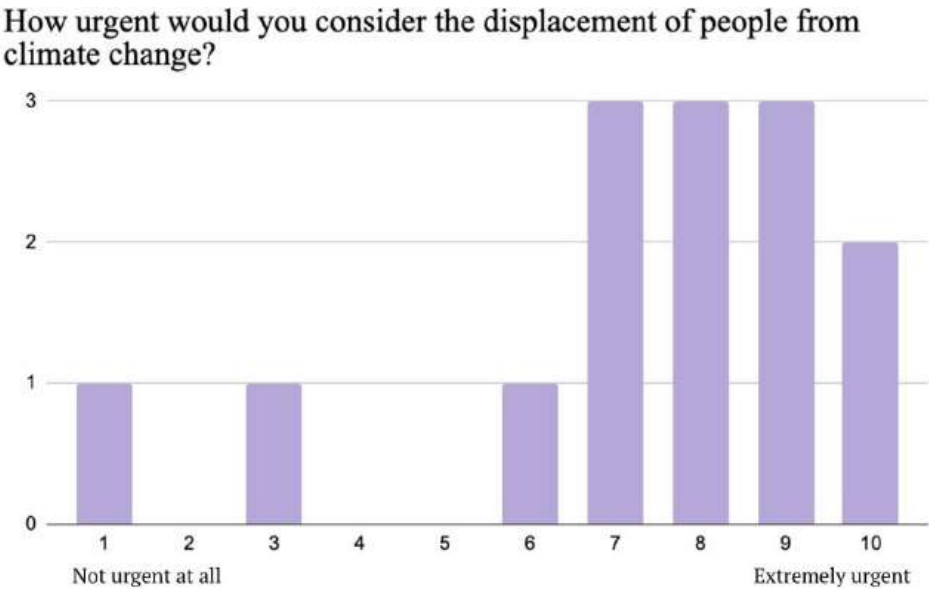


Figure 3: Responses to the question “How urgent would you consider the displacement of people from climate change?”

After establishing the urgency of climate change and climate induced migration, the OECD *Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* were discussed and how effective they are in implementing sustainable practices among corporations. The general consensus was that the guidelines are ideal in principle, but that their non-binding status prevents them from being constructively implemented. When asked how effective the interviewees found current laws and guidelines in addressing climate change and climate induced migration, the ratings were very low. On a scale from 1 (extremely ineffective) to 10 (extremely effective), thirteen out of fourteen (92.9%) respondents rated the guidelines as 5/10 or less. Most respondents found that the guidelines set an agreeable standard for sustainability and ethical business conduct, but that without an enforcement mechanism they would be rendered futile. Overall, there was little faith that multinational enterprises would make sustainable changes to their business based on this non-binding set of guidelines. Across a variety of political opinions, regions in the United States, and levels of involvement in climate activism, there was a general consensus that the urgency of climate change is extremely high, while the efficacy of current regulations is inadequate.

How well equipped do you think current laws and guidelines are for addressing climate change and climate induced migration?

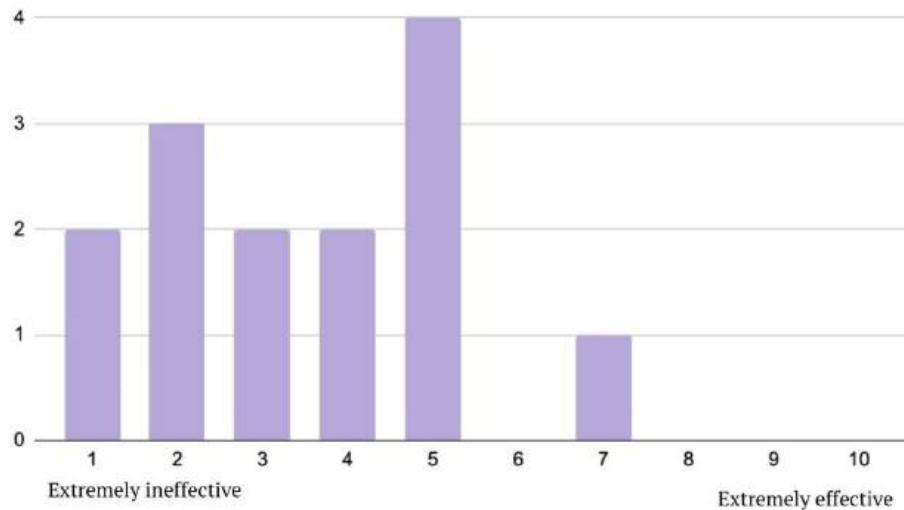


Figure 4: Responses to the question “How well equipped do you think current laws and guidelines are for addressing climate change and climate induced migration?”

A major trend among the interviews was the view that responsibility for climate induced displacement should fall on multinational enterprises. In instances where multinational corporations contribute to the direct displacement of people, such as oil spills, all participants found that enterprises should be held accountable. When it comes to direct displacement responsibility is relatively simple to identify. In contrast, slow onset or indirect displacement is more difficult to pinpoint. An example of how multinational enterprises contribute to slow onset displacement is through the emission of greenhouse gasses which exacerbates climate change, and then results in the gradual rise of sea level that displaces communities. With the slow-onset effects of climate change, multinational enterprises are further removed from the actual displacement of people and the causal relationship is less clear. When asking participants about accountability for slow-onset climate induced migration, most interviewees maintained that multinational enterprises should be liable. Given the extensive wealth of these corporations, participants thought that providing reparations for the relocation of climate refugees would simply be “one drop in the bucket” for the transnational enterprises. In this way, large corporations are much better equipped to provide compensation for climate refugees as opposed to individual states who may lack the resources needed.

## Solutions

Based on the information gathered from this fieldwork, there are two proposed solutions for holding multinational corporations accountable: regulations and incentives. Eleven out of fourteen (78.6%) interviewees found that both regulations and incentives should be leveraged against multinational enterprises to ensure the human rights protection of climate refugees. Regulations would consist of legislation on the international level to monitor and limit the carbon emissions and environmental impacts of multinational corporations. All interviewees also condoned increased

finances and punitive punishments for violations of international expectations for sustainability and human rights standards. Potential regulations would additionally hold corporations liable for providing reparations or alternate housing to displaced people. To implement these regulations many participants agreed that international organizations such as the UN or the OECD should be given more enforcement power for their current soft law standards. One way to enable enforcement would be to make the current recommendations of the *Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* legally binding to ensure their efficacy.

The second way to hold corporations accountable and prevent their environmental and human rights violations would be to provide them with incentives. Given that corporations are predominantly driven by profit, incentives may be a successful form of motivation. Examples include tax breaks for sustainable alternatives to business practices, or carbon taxes on greenhouse gas emissions. Carbon taxes require companies to pay a fee per ton of greenhouse gases they emit (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions). This will economically incentivize companies to lower their greenhouse gas emissions. As of 2021, “There are currently 27 countries with a carbon tax implemented: Argentina, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Denmark, the European Union (27 countries), Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, the UK, and Ukraine” (Lai, 2021). In many more countries carbon taxes are being considered or have been scheduled for implementation.

Three out of fourteen (21.4%) interviewees supported the accountability mechanism of only incentives as opposed to regulations. These individuals believed that there should be less state interference within businesses and the economy because it would restrict the profit within individual countries. Even though state regulations were opposed by a few interviewees, these individuals were open to the involvement of an international governing body. The participants did not support limitations for their country’s businesses that other countries were not also subjected to. As a result, international regulations were perceived as preferable seeing as they would affect a larger span of countries as opposed to “restricting” individual states.

It is important to note that the difference between those who supported both regulations and incentives as opposed to those who only preferred incentives did not depend on age, location or political affiliation. In general, there were both conservatives and liberals who were in favor of both regulations and incentives because they had been personally affected by or familiar with climate induced migration. The common factor between the individuals who only supported incentives was that they lacked personal experience with the adverse effects of climate change. Even individuals who were non-activists and considered themselves not very well informed on climate issues still supported both solutions. This is because they had seen the direct impacts of climate change within their own communities. As a result, the differences in opinion regarding potential solutions reflect the variation of life experience between individuals.

## **Future considerations and Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research assesses the impacts that multinational enterprises have on the environment and the international mechanisms in place for regulating the effects of these corporations on the environment. Public opinion was analyzed in order to determine the efficacy of international mechanisms like the OECD, and where accountability for climate induced displacement should lie. Interviewing individuals with a wide variety of interests gave valuable

insight to how people perceive the climate crisis and climate refugees. These opinions are important to consider seeing as every individual has power as both a voter and as a consumer. It should be noted that this sample of interviewees was gathered voluntarily. The participants were not randomly selected and were primarily located in Pennsylvania and California, so their opinions cannot be generalized to represent those of the entire population. Future research should account for an even wider variety of perspectives and individuals from different backgrounds to determine what specific types of regulations and incentives could be implemented.

This small scale research demonstrates the benefit of facilitating conversations surrounding accountability for climate induced migration, and justifies why there is value in conducting a larger scale project. This initial fieldwork demonstrates the commonalities of opinion that different people share with regard to corporate responsibility and the environment. The question of accountability for climate change is extremely complex, but with climate refugees being displaced at surging rates an effective solution must be established to protect their human rights.

Based on this research, multinational enterprises must take more responsibility for their impact on the environment, and for the resulting displacement of people from immediate and slow-onset effects like oil spills and sea level rise. Despite the polarization of today's society, it was agreed upon that regulations and incentives are potential solutions to be implemented in order to regulate the compliance of multinational enterprises with international agreements, protect climate refugees, and combat climate change.

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AUTHOR FEATURE

# Tommy Lin

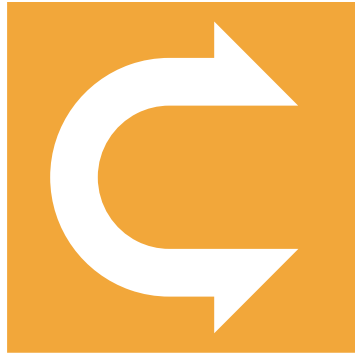


TOMMY  
LIN  
FOURTH YEAR

LINGUISTICS AND  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
MAJOR

Tommy is a fourth-year student who is graduating from the University of California - San Diego with BAs in linguistics and religious studies in Spring 2022 and will be attending the University of Texas at Austin in Fall 2022 to pursue a dual graduate program in women and gender studies and information studies. Their undergraduate research focuses were on digital storytelling, ludology, and religious studies, and they hope to focus on mis-/disinformation in digitized religions and its intersection with queerness during their graduate program. In their free time, Tommy enjoys reading tarot cards as a practice in self-awareness and honing intuition.





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## **Queer Immersion in Person 4 Golden**

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# Queer Immersion in Persona 4 Golden

Tommy Lim

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on two characters from the digital game *Persona 4 Golden* (2008, rev. 2012) who harbor shame around their queerness. During the course of the game, these two characters – Kanji and Naoto – undergo a form of “group therapy” and self-acceptance to resolve that shame. Throughout this process, *Persona 4 Golden* creates an immersive experience where players become and also assist the two characters in grappling with their shame. This interaction with shame is particularly effective when queer players immerse themselves in the game, as the objectives of confronting and reconciling with characters’ queer shame compound with their own journey of navigating their queerness. Consequently, queer players may find *Persona 4 Golden* to be therapeutic.

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## Introduction

In digital games, the *Persona* franchise is one prominent series in the subgenre of Japanese roleplaying games (JRPGs). Iterations of the *Persona* franchise generally follow a group of high schoolers who, when met with “shadows” – monsters seeking to harm humans – conjure “personas,” powerful manifestations of their personality that destroy shadows. *Persona* games model these confrontations between shadows and personas as turn-based battles where players determine commands that the high schoolers delegate to their personas. In addition to its gameplay, *Persona*’s rich storytelling and compelling array of characters have earned the praise of many critics and gamers.

Among the *Persona* games, *Persona 4 Golden* (P4G) warrants special interest due to its navigation of queer shame, specifically around the dilemma between rejecting or accepting one’s queerness. The broader inquiry this paper will explore is how P4G compounds its exploration of queer shame with its interactive nature as a video game. Within this inquiry is an investigation of how P4G explores the concept of queer shame on both the visual and ludological levels, affording audiences a chance to feel empathy for the characters’ shame in ways that can potentially be therapeutic for queer players. Additionally, the three gameplay elements of screen perspective, combat, and dungeon exploration serve to further immerse players in wrestling with queer shame.

Regarding P4G’s potentially therapeutic qualities, immersive features allow players to assume the perspectives of victims confronting their shame and the characters who aid in this confrontation. Players’ ability to assume these positionalities renders them central to someone’s confrontation of and triumph over their shame through group and self-acceptance. This experience empowers players – especially those who struggle with their queerness – to embody and find comfort in P4G’s gameplay and narrative.

My analysis focuses on two main characters from P4G – Kanji Tatsumi and Naoto Shirogane – over the course of three phases: a pre-confrontational phase where characters explore a dungeon to save Kanji or Naoto, a confrontational phase where Kanji or Naoto rejects their shame which results in battle, and a post-confrontational phase where Kanji or Naoto acknowledges their shame and reconciles with it.

## Previous Analysis of the *Persona* Series

While this paper only analyzes P4G, other *Persona* games also explore queerness, though in arguably less prominent ways. In *Persona 2: Innocent Sin*, Tatsuya Suou – the main character – is able to choose one of four romantic relationships, two with girls and two with boys. While the player’s ability to choose queer storylines is arguably immersive, *Persona 2* is one of the earliest iterations that received less attention than P4G did. *Persona 3* and *Persona 5* also explore queerness, albeit superficially. Their presentation of queerness is peripheral, as most characters exhibiting non-heterosexual attractions are non-player characters (NPCs) with a couple of strings of repeated dialogue. A potentially queer character with greater prominence is Lala Escargot from *Persona 5*. Her deep voice and quaffed purple hair, as well as prominent makeup, imply Lala’s identity as a drag queen. However, *Persona 5* never explicitly confirms Lala’s status as

one, and she remains a side character.

That said, existing scholarship on other *Persona* games provides a strong foundation for analyzing the structure and themes of this series. For example, *Persona 3* has the same focus on selfhood, interpersonal connection, and gameplay as P4G. Todd Harper's analysis of *Persona 3* specifically discusses the significance of personas. More than a mere being that players must summon to engage in combat, the persona is a reflection of a given character's personality and storyline (Harper, 2011). Whether the persona reflects a character through their appearance or name, each persona is an analog to a character's identity.

As well as commenting on the persona's importance, Harper also discusses the rhetorical importance of gameplay in *Persona 3*. Central to Harper's analysis of *Persona 3* is his use of Ian Bogost's model of procedural rhetoric. Procedural rhetoric establishes that "mechanics and theme combine to create modified simulations of actual rhetorical events; by changing the system of representation in a simulated way, the game makes a rhetorical argument about how things are" (Harper, 2011). In this regard, Harper explains how *Persona 3* enables players to freely interact with in-game characters and environments to diversify play. Harper explains how the interactivity of *Persona 3* offers a varied and involved experience for players.

In analyzing P4G, Ashley Pearson unpacks the Jungian language within P4G and other *Persona* iterations, particularly around the phenomenon of facing one's shadow. Similar to Harper, Pearson touches upon the immersiveness of *Persona* by explaining how P4G situates the main character within the mundaneness of high-school life. With obligations potentially arising from part-time jobs, romantic interests, friendships, and academics, the main character must decide what to decline and involve themselves in (Pearson, 2017). The Jungian language of "persona" and "shadow" became more prominent in P4G's main cast of characters. While Pearson admits that P4G offers a reductive representation of self as described by Jung, she explains that main characters undergo a process of "individuation – a psychological maturation of the self that unifies the aspects of the unconscious, such as one's shadow, with the ego and persona of the conscious mind" (Pearson, 2017). Here, Pearson explains a central, recurring event in P4G: the ordeal of reconciling one's unaccepted aspects of identity with accepted aspects of identity.

Another connection between Jung and P4G is that of shadows. Pearson explains that the Jungian shadow represents one's "negative, undesirable, or un-lived" qualities. The shadows' opposition to someone's established values results in a suppression of personal qualities associated with the shadow (Pearson, 2017). Most of P4G's playable characters enter the narrative with their shadow selves unreconciled with their conscious selves. This prompts characters to acknowledge their shadows, which results in the persona: the embodiment of a given character's reconciliation between their shadow and ego (Pearson, 2017).

Thomas Lamarre, like Pearson, analyzes how P4G prompts characters to engage in self-transformation. While Pearson explains a confrontation of one's undesired characteristics as a reconciliatory process, Lamarre explains it as a "psychic, therapeutic self-transformation" (Lamarre, 2017). Lamarre contextualizes a character's quest to unlock their persona around convalescence and self-revelation. Lamarre further distinguishes their thinking from Pearson by

understanding the shadow as a representation of their vulnerability. By not only acknowledging but avowing their vulnerability, individuals gain their persona (Lamarre, 2017).

Lamarre also discusses the relationship between an individual's struggle to confront their shadow and their group's cruciality in ensuring the individual's success in this struggle. As the story progresses, playable characters assist each other in acknowledging their shadows, resembling a group therapy session (Lamarre, 2017). While each character's shadow is unique in the negative qualities they embody, their friends assist in helping them gain personas and reinforce group camaraderie (Lamarre 2017). The effect that Lamarre identifies in a character's acquisition of their persona is clarity in who they are. Shadows result from characters' distorted perception of themselves: their initial self-perception is inaccurate because it omits their unwanted characteristics, and results in a shadow's manifestation (Lamarre 2017). However, the shadow dissipates when characters acquire personas, an embodiment of a truer perception of self that includes unwanted characteristics (Lamarre, 2017).

In this paper, I expand on this ongoing discussion of P4G by focusing on the relationship between gameplay, immersion, and audience. Rather than investigating the rhetorical significance of the game's ludic features, I examine how these features elevate the immersiveness of the game for the audience. For this paper, immersion refers to opportunities P4G presents through which gamers emotionally involve themselves in the game and the gameplay. I focus my analysis on the characters of Naoto and Kanji because their shadows manifest specifically due to issues of queerness. My analysis describes the relationship between their shadow selves and queerphobia, examining how these characters' struggle to acquire their persona deepens the interactivity of the game, especially for players who struggle or have struggled with their queerness.

Queerness refers to an inability to obey or fulfill cis-heteronormative roles. Compounding this traditional notion of queerness is Bonnie Ruberg's understanding of it as a counterhegemony entailing opposition to culturally imposed norms (Ruberg, 2018). I analyze how queerness appears in P4G through Kanji's and Naoto's status as queer characters, as well as the culturally imposed norms they oppose when reconciling with their queer shame. I also discuss how the immersive and therapeutic qualities of P4G enable queer players to similarly experience the characters' queer self-acceptance and opposition to opposed norms. The exploration of queerness within P4G is significant because numerous video game characters' flamboyance and androgyny queercode them, but their queerness is often used to a perfunctory, comedic effect. P4G centralizes Naoto's and Kanji's queerness, framing them within a narrative of self-acceptance as opposed to relegating it to a comedic trope.

#### ***Persona 4 Golden: Yu, Kanji, and Naoto***

P4G centers around the main character, canonically known as Yu Narukami, although players may name him whatever they please. After Yu moves to Inaba, a fictional Japanese town, a string of murders ensue. Yu and his friends then investigate the murders, prevent the deaths of future victims, and identify the culprit. An essential part of their investigation is exploring the Midnight Channel, a parallel world populated by malevolent creatures known as shadows. Yu and his friends venture into the Midnight Channel, where the culprit traps the victims to kill

them later. By entering various dungeons in the Midnight Channel, the party finds potential victims, saves them by defeating the shadows, and guides them back to the real world. Central to the *Persona* franchise is the personas themselves. Many victims, after being saved from the Midnight Channel, receive an avatar they wield against shadows. These avatars are personas: the embodiment of one's reconciliation between suppressed and conscious self-identities.

The dungeons in the Midnight Channel are directly affected by the person trapped in them. The dungeon's form depends on the specific shame a victim is feeling, and Yu becomes friends with most of the victims he rescues. One of these friends is Kanji Tatsumi, the school delinquent. Kanji is one of the first people that Yu saves from the Midnight Channel and joins Yu's group of friends. Kanji has a brash personality, presenting himself as a punk kid with his bleached hair, all-black outfit, and shoulder skull tattoo. Consequently, Inaba citizens generally fear and scorn Kanji. Despite this, Kanji enjoys traditionally feminine hobbies like crocheting and sewing. Kanji explains that his hyper-masculine presentation stems from his fear of being seen as queer or feminine due to his hobbies. Another friend is Naoto Shirogane, a child detective who visits Inaba to assist in solving the string of murders. Ironically, Naoto becomes one of the victims, and Yu's party must save her from the Midnight Channel. Like Kanji, Naoto eventually joins Yu's friends and becomes a major character. Although a girl, Naoto's deeper voice and gender-ambiguous clothing lead many to misidentify her as male. Naoto's insecurity around her gender results in her masculine presentation, as she believes that presenting as masculine will result in her coworkers taking her seriously.

### **Analyzing Queer Shame & Self-Identity in P4G**

As stated before, I analyze queer shame and immersion in P4G in three phases: pre-confrontational, confrontational, and post-confrontational. The pre-confrontational phase emphasizes aesthetic and ludological importance to Kanji's and Naoto's individual dungeons. Particularly, this section highlights how P4G complicates the players' task of traversing Naoto and Kanji's dungeons. The confrontational phase assesses the moment in which Yu and his party discover Kanji or Naoto in their respective dungeons. This assessment focuses on the dialogue exchanged between Kanji and Naoto to their shadows and the battle that ensues when Naoto and Kanji initially reject their shadows. Lastly, the post-confrontational phase examines the effects of Naoto and Kanji acknowledging their shadows as legitimate aspects of their identity. Specifically, this final phase analyzes the visual significance of the persona that results from form Naoto and Kanji's reconciliation with their shadows.

#### **Pre-Confrontation**

The responsibility of saving Kanji and Naoto does not rest on either of them alone. Rather, the existing cast of characters band together and save them from their dungeons. During the pre-confrontational phase, Yu and his friends traverse the dungeons to rescue Kanji and Naoto. The player's mobility is an integral aspect of gameplay in Kanji's and Naoto's unique dungeons. Players control Yu with an analog stick that determines how Yu navigates dungeons. Direct control over Yu's motion undergirds the immersive experience of the game. Players must move within dungeons themselves with Yu as their avatar.

Kanji's dungeon takes the form of a men's only sauna titled the "Steamy Bathhouse." While the Bathhouse's interior features corridors, saunas, and steam, the antechamber is a changing room. A changing room door leads into the interior. As the player descends into the Bathhouse, the steaminess increases to the point where details of the dungeon are harder to see. A more saturated, grainier display indicates an increase in steaminess.



Fig. 1. JohneAwesome. *Persona 4 Golden - Part 17 - Steamy Bathhouse*, 2015

The visual details of Kanji's dungeon invoke a sensual tone when compounded with P4G's text. When players venture into a certain point in the Bathhouse, a conversation with shadow Kanji commences. Shadow Kanji conjures up a sign stating "MEN ONLY!!! Kanji Tatsumi IN Rosy Steam Paradise," accompanied by images of a heart and roses (*Persona 4 Golden*, 2012). Shadow Kanji himself contributes to the menacingly sensual tone of the dungeon, as he dons a *fundoshi* – a traditionally male Japanese underwear – as well as a perpetual smile and blush. From the Steamy Bathhouse's qualities, it becomes clear that Kanji's dungeon is a manifestation of his shame. The imagery of steam, nakedness, and male bodies establish the sensual tone reflecting Kanji's inner femininity and queerness.

The Steamy Bathhouse is immersive for the player because of the aesthetic and thematic elements constructing the journey through the dungeon. Steaminess imaginatively functions as a metaphor for Kanji's distortion. Players' increasing difficulty in perceiving the contents of their screen reflects players' increasing proximity to Shadow Kanji, whom players meet at the bottom of the dungeon. The player – although not directly playing as Kanji – assumes Kanji's position of experiencing his distortion. Players cannot see inside the Bathhouse, similar to Kanji's refusal to acknowledge his femininity and queerness.



Fig. 2 and 3. JohneAwesome. *Persona 4 Golden - Part 17 - Steamy Bathhouse*, 2015, *Persona 4 Golden - Part 18 - A Man's World*, 2015

The synonymy between steaminess and sexual promiscuity reveals a figurative interpretation of steaminess. Saunas entail scantily clad guests, and the bathhouse's men-only status brings specific attention to male bodies. Shadow Kanji embodies the steaminess of the bathhouse: his exposed muscular physique and hedonism express the sensual atmosphere the steam facilitates.

Quite different from Kanji is Naoto's dungeon, called the "Secret Laboratory." Reminiscent of a science-fiction secret base, characters note how the Laboratory resembles a secret base that could be in kids' sci-fi TV shows. The antechamber resides in a forested area as a bunker entrance replete with satellite dishes. Due to the dungeon's security system, players embark on a scavenger hunt to find the IDs that grant them access to the Laboratory's depths.



Fig. 4. JohneAwesome. *Persona 4 Golden - Part 58 - Secret Laboratory*, 2015



The Laboratory's interior is futuristic and metallic. Splatters of neon green on the floors and walls (presumably radioactive sludge) appear throughout the dungeon. The Laboratory also features control rooms equipped with buttons, screens, and levers. The lowest floor of the room – Shadow Naoto's abode – features a surgical table where comically large lights, a drill, and rotary saw loom directly above it.



Fig. 5 and 6. JohneAwesome. *Persona 4 Golden - Part 58 - Secret Laboratory*, 2015, *Persona 4 Golden - Part 61 - Shadow Naoto*, 2015

Similar to Kanji, Naoto's dungeon represents her shame through its aesthetic and ludic features. Naoto's shame around gender prompts her to compensate by projecting a calculating, masculine demeanor. The Secret Laboratory's highly technological environment embodies this performed and desired demeanor. The myriad screens, buttons, and metal surfaces reflect Naoto's need to appear unemotional and technical so she receives respect in her profession. The surgery room is the primary manifestation of Naoto's shame around being female. The drill and saw above the surgery table suggest the idea of gender reassignment surgery, the anatomical transformation to emulate maleness that illustrates Naoto's desire to become a man.

Immersion in the Secret Laboratory comes in the puzzle-like nature of Naoto's dungeon. Naoto's dungeon features a locked door requiring multiple IDs to unlock. Given that the Secret Laboratory is a spatial manifestation of Naoto's shame around her gender, its obstacles indicate how Naoto is unwilling to disclose her shame to others, even if at her own expense. In this way, the underlying theme of saving these people from themselves is evident. Shadow Naoto is locked away in the Laboratory, and this echoes how Naoto suppresses her youth and femaleness through her masculine self-presentation. Players' task to scavenge for items that provide access to Shadow Naoto creates an immersive challenge. For example, the loudspeaker contributes to the Laboratory's security system and calls the player a trespasser who must leave. The vilification of the main characters – and effectively, the player controlling them – forms another point of immersion. When characterized as an intruder, players must fulfill their role of successfully trespassing into the Secret Laboratory and saving Naoto. The confrontation of shame is evident in how the Laboratory threatens and hinders players from exploring it.

## Confrontation

When Yu reach the farthest depths of a given dungeon, they battle a shadow holding a victim hostage. Prior to Yu battling the shadows, Kanji and Naoto converse with their shadows. In both conversations, Kanji and Naoto deny that the shadows are manifestations of their shame, and thereby denounce claims that the shadows reveal any true insight into their characters. Spurned, the shadows transform into monstrous manifestations of their shame which the party of characters must defeat.



Fig. 7 and 8. JohneAwesome. *Persona 4 Golden - Part 19 - Shadow Kanji*, 2015, *Persona 4 Golden - Part 61 - Shadow Naoto*, 2015

An interesting facet to these conversations – aside from the dialogue – is the “camera work”. During both conversations, the player shares the point of view of Yu and the party, who look on as they witness Kanji or Naoto reject their shadows. The use of perspective is crucial because it places the player within the perspective of Yu and the party, who are saving Kanji and Naoto. Indeed, this becomes another point of immersion. By having the screen’s perspective within the crowd, a player is not merely observing a storyline unfold but is directly involved in it. Even more, it blurs the distinction between the player and the characters they control. The player feels like one of the characters themselves, one of many in a crowd attempting to save Naoto and Kanji from themselves.

Shadow Kanji transforms into a monstrous form that players must battle. In this form, Shadow Kanji has his arms crossed over his chest, with the lower half of his body submerged in a bed of roses. Armor that is reminiscent of a bodybuilder encases this bed of roses. The right half of this armor is gray, with the other being black. The armor holds two gold male symbols on either hand. Thorny, leafy vines protrude from the bed of roses and wrap around the armor’s arms. On either side of Shadow Kanji are Tough Guy and Nice Guy, who appear as bodybuilders with facial hair. Like Shadow Kanji’s armor, they are both muscular and feature gray and black halves to their bodies. During the battle, all three figures assume flexing positions.



Fig. 9. JohneAwesome. *Persona 4 Golden - Part 19 - Shadow Kanji*, 2015

Shadow Kanji's transformed appearance represents Kanji's shame around his femininity and queerness. The juxtaposition between the bed of roses and the muscular armor embodies Kanji's conflict between his stifled femininity and outward projection of masculinity. The thorny vines protruding from the bed of roses characterize his inner femininity as something insidious. Shadow Kanji complicates this insidious understanding of femininity as he lies in the bed of roses. With his arms crossed over his bare chest, Shadow Kanji's delicate pose embodies Kanji's femininity, while the thorny vines indicate how Kanji is critical of his femininity.

Focusing on Shadow Kanji's armor and the Tough and Nice Guys, their musculature and visually dichotomized aesthetic illustrate Kanji's desire to project masculinity over femininity. All three figures feature black and white halves, which could embody the separation Kanji recognizes between himself and his shame. Kanji separates his hidden side of being feminine and queer from aspects of himself he accepts. The musculature of these figures – accompanied by their flexing poses – represents the part of Kanji he accepts: his boyish rowdiness. The contrast between the bed of roses and the three figures could illustrate Kanji's desire to overcompensate for his femininity. This is further indicated by how Shadow Kanji's armor wields two male symbols as weapons. While these weapons could represent Kanji's inclination to display his masculinity violently, they could also suggest his attraction to men.

Shadow Naoto transforms into a flying robot that players must defeat. Shadow Naoto takes on a mechanistic form, where Shadow Naoto's right half is evidently more robotic than her right half. The right half exhibits a steel frame with blue coils appearing where her joints are. The left half is more reminiscent of Naoto's standard appearance, with the exception of black skin. The black skin is juxtaposed with the gray metal that constructs the right half of Shadow Naoto's face.



Shadow Naoto also holds futuristic guns in both hands. Shadow Naoto's jetpack and foot-rocket allow her to remain afloat. During this battle, Shadow Naoto's robotic appearance is matched by her mobility.



Fig. 10. JohneAwesome. *Persona 4 Golden - Part 61 - Shadow Naoto*, 2015

Similar to Shadow Kanji, Shadow Naoto's transformation embodies Naoto's shame, although hers has more to do with shame around gender. Shadow Naoto's transformation envisions what Naoto could look like post-surgery, with her robotic appearance erasing her female gender. A motherboard of buttons replaces her chest, and her body is more indicative of a steel marionette than the body of an adolescent girl. Shadow Naoto's clothed half reinforces the erasure of femaleness. The clothed half resembles what Naoto usually wears, which fools people into thinking she is a boy.

Closely related to Naoto's insecurities around gender is her toxic commitment to professional success: Shadow Naoto's robotic design illustrates Naoto's shame around femaleness as she perceives it as a detriment to her success as a detective. Shadow Naoto's movement is mechanical. The mechanical, emotionless motion represents a counteraction to the connotation of over-emotivity attached to the female gender. Since Shadow Naoto articulates that being a girl is detrimental to her profession as a detective, the robotic movements demonstrate an effort to appeal to patriarchal expectations of professionalism. In all, Shadow Naoto is an exaggerated projection of masculinity and professionalism that Naoto already presents: by becoming masculine and robotic, Naoto can exist in her workplace as the ideal worker.

Shadow Kanji and Shadow Naoto are some of the strongest enemies in their respective dungeons. The shadows' strength enriches gameplay, as battles against them are harder than battles previously fought in their dungeons. When fighting them, players choose up to four

characters to fight the shadows with. Shadow Kanji and Shadow Naoto also have unique attacks which are deadlier than attacks executed by weaker enemies. Shadow Kanji's and Shadow Naoto's unique skill sets – compounded by their unique designs – make their battles unique and especially challenging for the player.

A major point of immersion in P4G's confrontation of shame is the battle system. The player must confront a victim's manifestation of shame in the context of combat. Even more, confrontation is quite literal: by using melee weapons on hand (swords, knives, fans) and destructive magic spells, players must strategize how to defeat Shadow Naoto and Shadow Kanji. By directly involving players in a battle against someone's shame, P4G thoroughly immerses players in its presentation of shame and holds them responsible for its resolution.



Fig. 11 and 12. JohneAwesome. *Persona 4 Golden - Part 19 - Shadow Kanji*, 2015, *Persona 4 Golden - Part 61 - Shadow Naoto*, 2015

Even the unique attacks that Shadow Kanji and Shadow Naoto deal out are immersive and a source of shame. Shadow Kanji's attack known as "Forbidden Murmur" specifically poisons male party members, while his "Roar of Wrath" specifically enrages female party members. Shadow Kanji's gender-selective attacks further illustrate his shame. "Forbidden Murmur" could allude to his desire to stifle undesired attraction towards men, while "Roar of Wrath" could allude to his frustration over girls ridiculing him for his femininity. Even more, Shadow Kanji's unique attacks further involve the players because they control the characters who suffer from these ailments of poison and rage. With regards to Shadow Naoto, her unique move "Mute Ray" inflicts severe damage to a single character, as well as disabling their ability to use magic, a status known as "silence". The theme of silence in Shadow Naoto's attack represents Naoto's need to mute her gender identity to receive professional recognition. Like Shadow Kanji, the fact that this special attack harms playable characters – and, consequently, the player's chances of winning the battle – creates the immersive experience of confronting shame as it compels the player to strategize ways to survive the shadows' offense.

A similarity between either battle is that both shadows will state something about a character's shame when they have surpassed a threshold of damage. Shadow Naoto produces statements about her desire to surgically alter Naoto's body: "No, no that will never do! Patients must lie still for me to drill proper holes into them" (*Persona 4 Golden*, 2012). Shadow Kanji makes

sexually suggestive comments: “So big and strong...You want this...Come with me” (*Persona 4 Golden*, 2012). In either case, both shadows express frustration over their victims’ inability to acknowledge them: Shadow Naoto asks, “why won’t you acknowledge me,” while Shadow Kanji exclaims, “You don’t accept me! You’ll never accept me” (*Persona 4 Golden*, 2012). These exclamations also speak to the society that makes them feel ashamed. Naoto speaks to how her femaleness prevents her from receiving professional recognition. On the other hand, Kanji expresses frustration over the Inaba community’s inability to respect his feminine traits. The shadows’ comments provide further insight into their true desires. Despite their hostility, desperation for acceptance drives the shadows. This truth complicates the emotional landscape of the battles: while players must defeat these shadows, they also realize the sad truth that shadows merely desire recognition from the people they originate from, Kanji and Naoto. This emotional complexity deepens the players’ emotional involvement, consequently reinforcing the immersion of the game.

For queer players, battling these shadows requires them to fight against horrific embodiments of Kanji’s and Naoto’s shame around queerness. Battle provides form and structure to the intangible and emotional process of grappling with queerness: fighting these shadows becomes an observable, quantifiable effort to destroy the shame that prevents characters from acknowledging their queerness. Queer players may consequently find it therapeutic to engage in a medium that enables them to battle against queer shame in such an explicit manner.

### Post-Confrontation

Upon defeating Shadow Kanji and Naoto in battle, a conversation follows where Kanji and Naoto acknowledge the existence of their shadows and the shame they embody. After reconciling with the shadows, they dissipate into a shining tarot card that bursts into multiple pieces, and from this explosion, a Persona appears.

During the conversation with their shadows, Naoto and Kanji reluctantly acknowledge them and the shame they represent. Naoto and Kanji even acknowledge their shadows as parts of themselves while the other characters look on. Crucially, the perspective of this conversation is that of the crowd of characters.



Fig. 13 and 14. JohneAwesome. *Persona 4 Golden - Part 19 - Shadow Kanji*, 2015, *Persona 4 Golden - Part 61 - Shadow Naoto*, 2015



Similar to how the screen's perspective is significant when Kanji and Naoto spurn their shadows, it is also significant when Kanji and Naoto reconcile with their shadows. With the screen's perspective being the view of the crowd of characters, the player perceives the situation as the in-game characters would. Effectively, players – who controlled the characters to defeat the shadows – become characters of the game themselves. The screen's perspective transforms players into observers of Kanji and Naoto's acknowledgment of their shame. Players may recognize their importance in defeating the shadows and saving Kanji and Naoto from rejecting their own shame.

The therapeutic element in observing Kanji's and Naoto's reconciliation with their shame is that players become part of the support system for these characters. Although this is evident throughout the journey of entering a dungeon to save either character, the player is able to witness the fruit of their actions: a once-victim successfully acknowledges their queerness. This phenomenon is an especially therapeutic moment for queer players, as they become a kind of support system that once empowered them to acknowledge their queerness or one they currently need as they continue to grapple with their queerness.

Take-Mikazuchi is the name of Kanji's persona and materializes after Kanji acknowledges his shame around femininity and queerness as a genuine part of himself. Take-Mikazuchi is a robot-like giant wielding a golden thunderbolt as a melee weapon. Take-Mikazuchi's body is primarily black. Black fabric with white stripes is visible at its joints and covers its body. Metallic armor also covers Take-Mikazuchi's body, each piece emblazoned with a skeletal decoration that corresponds to the armor's location on the body (the chest plate displays a ribcage, the armor on the high displays a femur, etc.). The armor has a muscular definition. A technological aspect appears in the red and blue wires that run along Take-Mikazuchi's elbow region.



Fig. 15. JohneAwesome. *Persona 4 Golden - Part 19 - Shadow Kanji*, 2015

Take-Mikazuchi's virile appearance symbolizes Kanji's security in his own masculinity alongside his femininity. Shadow Kanji projects the lascivious image that Kanji fears people may view him as because of his femininity. Parallel to this, Take-Mikazuchi projects a masculine image of what Kanji truly views himself as after reconciling his queer shame. While he acknowledges the interest he may express in men and in his hobbies, Kanji understands that these traits are not at the expense of his masculinity.

While Take-Mikazuchi embodies Kanji's newfound confidence in his masculinity, it may also symbolize an admittance of Kanji's attraction toward men. Shadow Kanji speaks about his preference for male partners, even going so far as to say that the male protagonists would make for good boyfriends. Take-Mikazuchi's manifestation as a paragon of manliness may represent Kanji's queer sexual orientation as much as it represents Kanji's security in his masculinity.

Take-Mikazuchi's skeletal appearance further characterizes how Kanji reconciles with his shame. While Take-Mikazuchi's muscular body is armor-like in its sheer brawniness, the skeletal ornamentation contrasts this in its indication of what lies beneath the muscle. The skeleton symbolizes the vulnerability Kanji expresses in being honest about his feminine hobbies and possible attraction toward men. In addition to vulnerability, the skeleton serves to detach gender from Kanji's femininity. Take-Mikazuchi's pelvic region illustrates the bones that exist in that region, foregoing any illustration of genitalia. This anatomical ambiguity may represent the disassociation of his hobbies from misogyny. Kanji now indulges in his hobbies of sewing and painting without experiencing shame due to those hobbies' association with femininity. Indeed, the skeletal ornamentation reveals how much of Kanji's reconciliation is an internal one, but a legitimate one nonetheless.

The skeletal ornamentation throughout Take-Mikazuchi's largely black frame further illustrates the reconciliation that Kanji experiences between his masculinity and queerness. One of Shadow Kanji's aesthetic features is its dichotomized appearance where the left half of its body is black and the right half of its body is gray. Earlier on, this paper establishes that this dichotomy illustrates the division of Kanji's masculine and feminine traits, and his unwillingness to reconcile them. Contrastively, the white skeleton sprawled across Take-Mikazuchi's body illustrates the coexistence between his femininity and masculinity. Every segment of Take-Mikazuchi's body contains both black and white, illustrating not only reconciliation between his masculinity and femininity but a symbiosis between them. Take-Mikazuchi's musculoskeletal appearance illustrates a symbiotic relationship between Kanji's masculine and feminine qualities by establishing a relationship between skeleton and musculature. Take-Mikazuchi's black musculature represents Kanji's traditionally masculine outward appearance, while the white skeleton illustrates his inner femininity and hobbies he finally acknowledges but is still somewhat shy about. The visibility of both muscle and skeleton emphasize that these two elements – and the respective masculinity and femininity they represent – compose Take-Mikazuchi's body, and who Kanji is.

Sukuna-Hikona is the name of Naoto's persona and it materializes after Naoto acknowledges her shame around her gender. Sukuna-Hikona is the smallest persona in P4G. Sukuna-Hikona's weapon is a sword with a laser blade (akin to a lightsaber) that is longer than Sukuna-Hikona. Bandages cover Sukuna-Hikona's body. It has ankle-cut, brown leather shoes, as well as blue



shorts and a blazer that together look like a boy's school uniform. Beneath the blazer is a white collared button-down with a yellow tie. Sukuna-Hikona's headpiece/head features a distinctively insectoid aesthetic. The insectoid head is a more saturated blue than the uniform and is adorned with yellow antennae. Beneath the antennae are Sukuna-Hikona's eyes. The insectoid motif continues with Sukuna-Hikona's wings, which resemble those of a butterfly. Lastly, Sukuna-Hikona's body is wrapped in bandages, which are most visible in its hand- and leg-region, which are left exposed by its uniform.



Fig. 16. JohneAwesome. *Persona 4 Golden - Part 61 - Shadow Naoto*, 2015

When comparing Shadow Naoto's robotic form to Sukuna-Hikona, there is a shift from mechanistic to life-like aesthetics. Sukuna-Hikona's insectoid and humanoid qualities contrast the robotic characteristics of Shadow Naoto and dispel the negative traits it embodied. Shadow Naoto represents an unemotive, masculine attitude that Naoto channels at work to gain respect. Sukuna-Hikona represents a shedding of this self-imposed behavior: its rapidly flapping wings and human-like movements are more life-like than Shadow Naoto's robotic gestures and appearance. This aesthetic transformation reflects Naoto's conviction to thrive in her detective work without turning herself into its dehumanized instrument.

Another significant aspect of Sukuna-Hikona's appearance is its bandages. The bandages exist beneath Sukuna-Hikona's school uniform, effectively hiding the persona's "true" appearance beneath. One reason for the bandages is to signify how Naoto is in a convalescent stage in her queer journey. Now having acknowledged her identity as a girl, Naoto may heal from her history of silencing that identity which resulted in her self-masculinization. On the other hand, another reason for the bandages may be the protectiveness and privacy she now has over her gender identity. The bandages illustrate her conviction to exist as a girl while still ambiguating how others perceive her gender identity. Sukuna-Hikona's appearance further

facilitates the visual ambiguation of Naoto's gender through its helmet, hiding the Persona's face. These two interpretations of what the bandages signify suggest that Naoto is now recovering from a harrowing journey that culminated in a resolution with her gender and that she now owes her gender to no one.

The continuity in Shadow Naoto's boyish clothes into Sukuna-Hikona's schoolboy attire represents a shift in Naoto's perception of her androgyny as it relates to her gender identity. Shadow Naoto's bisected appearance in being half-boy and half-android demonstrates how Naoto conflated her boyish presentation with negative traits of being unfeeling and excessively utilitarian. Contrastively, Sukuna-Hikona wears the schoolboy attire in its entirety. This change indicates that Naoto no longer attaches her androgyny to those negative traits. The continuity between Shadow-Naoto's and Sukuna-Hikona's outfits speaks directly to Naoto's reconciliation with queer shame. Naoto exhibits queerness in her non-traditional means of gender expression through clothing: despite being a girl, she opts to dress like a boy, effectively disobeying expectations around what a girl ought to look like. While her androgyny came from a place of shame, Sukuna-Hikona's schoolboy attire signals that Naoto's androgyny no longer does.

Sukuna-Hikona's diminutive stature provides further insight into how Naoto changes her attitude towards her status as a girl. As Shadow Naoto is one of the smallest shadows in P4G, Sukuna-Hikona is the smallest Persona. Sukuna-Hikona's tininess reflects Naoto's acknowledgment of her status as a girl. Naoto understands the disempowering reality of being female in the detective industry, and Sukuna-Hikona's size illustrates this disempowerment. In surrendering her mal-informed motivations to project manhood, Naoto accepts her girlhood and recognizes the misogyny tied to it.

When combining the imagery of Sukuna-Hikona's tininess with her sword, it becomes clear that Naoto's acceptance of girlhood is not entirely disempowering. In nearly absurd contrast, Sukuna-Hikona wields a laser sword that easily surpasses the length of its body. Indeed, the relatively giant size of the sword symbolizes Naoto's empowerment in reconciling with her gender identity. Sukuna-Hikona's schoolboy attire, smallness, and bandages speak to Naoto's journey in recognizing the difficulty in being a girl, her status as one, and its coexistence with her androgyny. The transformations that Naoto undergoes become her source of power, which are illustrated by Sukuna-Hikona's sword.

After Naoto and Kanji obtain their personas, both characters become playable and can summon their personas in combat. If players opt to directly control characters in combat, they can determine what action Kanji and Naoto perform during battle. These actions include using Take-Mikazuchi or Sukuna-Hikona to support players' characters or harm opponents. Evenmore, Sukuna-Hikona's and Take-Mikazuchi's inclusion in battle sequences causes them to "level up". Leveling up allows personas to access more powerful skills and enjoy higher "stats" (such as increased endurance from enemy attacks) during battle.

The game's feature of recruiting Naoto and Kanji is another crucial point of immersion. The act of reconciling their shame does not end in the single moment after players defeat their shadows but continues into how these characters repeatedly summon their personas during gameplay. Players not only control Take-Mikazuchi and Sukuna-Hikona but can level them up the more

players use Naoto and Kanji in combat. Effectively, Naoto's and Kanji's journey to reconcile with their shame immerse players through the combat system. Players directly use the personas to defeat enemies in combat, indicating that the ability to resolve one's shame is an ultimately triumphant and empowering experience.

This point of immersion is a primary therapeutic element in P4G. Once enemies, the shadows' transformation into a persona allows players to command manifestations of Naoto's and Kanji's ability to accept their queerness as parts of them. Queer players can repeatedly deploy Sukuna-Hikona and Take-Mikazuchi to fight new shadows, which reflects Naoto's and Kanji's sustained efforts to acknowledge their queerness. For queer players, they see characters use their queerness – as something they once suppressed – to become powerful. In controlling Naoto's and Kanji's personas, players access that power and commemorate the queer self-acceptance that sustains that power.

### **Queering Ambiguity**

Although the analysis above posits that P4G presents queer narratives, it is crucial to note that the game never canonically establishes Naoto or Kanji as LGBT+ characters. The reluctance of P4G to queer Naoto's gender identity and Kanji's sexuality determined much of this paper's analysis of their queerness. As a result, this paper recognizes queerness in Kanji's hobbies and potential attraction to men, and never outrightly interprets him as a gay or bisexual character. Similarly, rather than addressing how Naoto is a transgender or genderqueer character, this paper frames Naoto's queerness around her androgyny and how her identity as a girl is compatible with her masculine self-presentation. While the queer analysis of this paper may indicate a lack of richness in the queer storytelling of this game, its ambiguity nonetheless allows queer readings into Naoto's and Kanji's characterizations. This section addresses points of ambiguity that ostensibly hinder queer interpretations of Kanji and Naoto, and how engaging in their stories still results in a queer experience.

The conversation between Kanji and his shadow prior to a battle with the latter only resituates Kanji's shame around a fear of rejection due to his effeminate hobbies, while his potential attraction towards men is left unaddressed. Shadow Kanji blames girls for his insecurity around sowing and painting and for questioning the integrity of his masculinity due to those hobbies. In spurning women, Shadow Kanji says that the alternative – men – are far better. Shadow Kanji's characterization of men as a superior alternative never establishes men as a superior romantic alternative, but only suggests that they are more accepting of his hobbies. Resultantly, Kanji's shame may not be centered around an attraction toward men, but the emasculation he endures from girls. The absence of discussion around Shadow Kanji's repeated show of interest in men – and its apparent resolution in Kanji's admission of his feminine hobbies – may invalidate the understanding of Kanji as a queer character. Rather, it may limit interpretations of Kanji's significance as a character who grapples with fragile masculinity and misogyny.

Despite the reluctance of this paper to outrightly characterize Kanji as an LGBT+ character, it is sufficient to understand Kanji as a richly queer character through his behavior alone. As a reminder, this paper understands queerness as a rebellion against culturally-imposed norms of what gender and sexuality ought to look like. Kanji rebels against the culturally-

imposed norm of being a straight man by enjoying feminine hobbies and bleaching his hair, two provable traits of his character. In aberrating from the expectation that straight men have “masculine” hobbies and avoid cosmetic changes like hair dyeing, Kanji becomes a queer character. This is all to say that while an interpretation of Kanji’s storyline as one of acknowledging internalized misogyny and fragile masculinity is valid, it is also reasonable to interpret his storyline as a queer one, especially when many LGBT+ gamers may resonate with Kanji’s queerness. Effectively, Kanji needs not become a canonically LGBT+ character to offer a legitimately queer storyline: his behaviors and shame and his journey in accepting them alone are sufficient.

Rather than demanding Naoto admit she wants to be a man, Shadow Naoto demands Naoto to admit she is a child. Shadow Naoto’s dialogue thus demonstrates that Naoto wants to become a man because she wants to become an adult. Consequently, when Shadow Naoto threatens to perform a “body alteration procedure” on Naoto, the procedure becomes important in its possibility of liberating Naoto from her puerility as well as her femininity. Infusing the discussion of Naoto’s gender with her age complicates the discussion of queerness because it suggests that Naoto may only dislike her status as a girl because of its childish connotation, and not because of internal conflicts with her gender identity. Even more, when Naoto formally acknowledges her shadow, she states that she does not desire to be a man but to accept herself for who she is. Naoto also recognizes that her desire to be a man comes from a place of seeking professional recognition. Thus, P4G frames Naoto’s idealization of maleness around standards of professionalism as opposed to a desire to be recognized as the gender she truly identifies with.

Naoto exhibits queerness through the actions of her shadow, as well as in her commitment to maintaining her androgyny, and not in any explicit affirmation from the game that she is a trans or genderqueer character. The element of the body alteration procedure that Shadow Naoto attempts to force onto Naoto alludes to the idea of a sex change, more appropriately known as a gender-affirming surgery today. Many – although certainly not all – trans people seek these surgeries to physically resemble their internal gender identity. Effectively, Shadow Naoto’s desire for Naoto to undergo one creates an opportunity through which trans and genderqueer gamers immerse themselves in Naoto’s narrative. Beyond that, an understanding of queerness as a rebellion against culturally-imposed norms on how gender and sexuality ought to look resonates with Naoto’s androgyny. In presenting in a traditionally masculine way despite identifying as female, Naoto is a queer character that queer audiences – who dress in a way that departs from cultural expectations of what a gender ought to look like – may relate to.

At the root of both Naoto’s and Kanji’s storylines is a fear of rejection. Shadow Naoto and Shadow Kanji demonstrate this fear by stating “why won’t you acknowledge me,” and “Won’t someone, anyone, please accept me,” respectively. Kanji and Naoto exhibit a fear of becoming outcasts, something that queer gamers who endure queerphobic spaces may empathize with. If not for any other reason, the ambiguity with which P4G characterizes Kanji and Naoto as LGBT+ characters does not hinder queer interpretations, as queer gamers may immerse themselves in the characters’ fear of social rejection.

## Conclusion

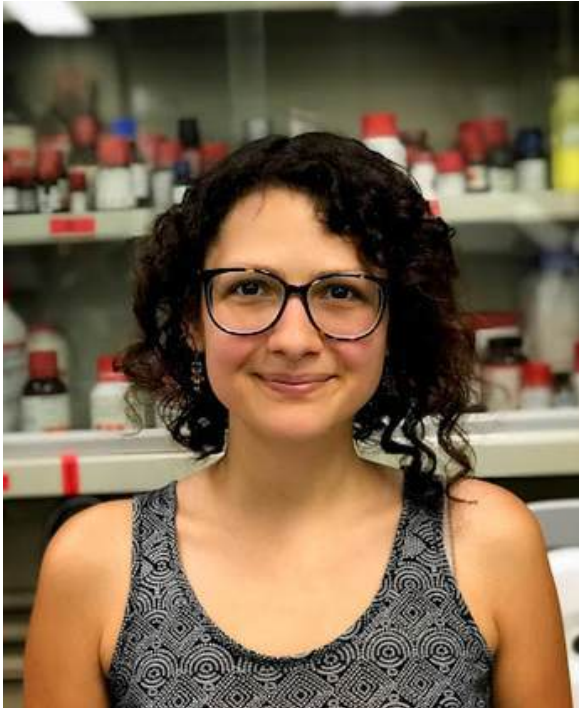
P4G's ludic experience compounds the visual experience by effectively providing players with immersive features to interact with Kanji's and Naoto's shame. The player's ability to freely navigate through dungeons, the need to face off against Kanji's and Naoto's shadows and the eventual reward of playing as Kanji and Naoto (and their personas) create an interactive experience of confronting and overcoming shame. Specifically, players can interact with shame around queerness, and how players may mirror the characters' therapeutic experience of overcoming their shame. Players save Kanji and Naoto from the violent manifestations of their queer shame by controlling a group of good samaritans. Assuming the position of the good samaritans allows players to experience a kind of support and reinforcement they may not access in real life. Additionally, the players' access to Naoto and Kanji – and their personas – allow players to become the very characters who reconciled their queer shame with their self-identity. Players thus assume two crucial positions in one's process of resolving queer shame: that of the support system that accepts the victim for who they are, and that of the victim who eventually accepts themselves as well.

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# Editor Features



## Viktoria Steck

Viktoria Steck is a Postdoctoral Researcher at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. She has a B.S. in Chemistry (2012) and currently studies the role of metalloenzymes within the marine microbial phosphorus cycle. In the future, she hopes to lead her own oceanographic research lab, and one day write a fantasy book. In her free time, Viktoria collect rocks, wood etc. for her fish tanks. She has a cat, likes camping, snorkeling, paddle boarding, painting, writing, and growing food in her vegetable garden.

## Granton Jindal

Granton Jindal has been a postdoctoral Fellow at UC San Diego since 2017. His research interests are in understanding how mutations in our genome affect embryonic development. In the future, he hopes to lead a team conducting research into understanding the biology of developmental diseases and how to treat the diseases using medicines. In his free time, Granton enjoys playing tennis, going on hikes, and cooking vegetarian food.



# Board Feature



## Luke Sztajnkrycer

### EDITOR IN CHIEF

Luke is a fourth-year Cognitive Science and Joint Math-Economics major in Muir College. He co-founded The Catalyst in the Summer of 2021 with a goal to provide blossoming undergraduate scholars and researchers with an inclusive and accessible option for publishing their work. A young researcher himself, Luke currently studies connections between episodic memory and decision-making under the guidance of Dr. Marcelo Mattar. In his free time, Luke enjoys practicing Kendo and laido alongside the UCSD teams, hiking, and playing video games with friends.



## Andrew Zhang

### ACADEMIC CO-ORDINATOR

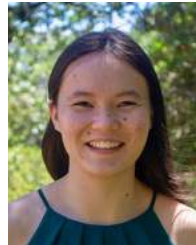
Andrew is a second-year neurobiology major in Muir college. As the academic coordinator, he strives to ensure the smooth communication between the undergraduate authors and graduate editors. He also reaches out to departments and organizations for collaborative endeavors focusing on outreach and success in undergraduate research. Outside of The Catalyst, Andrew is interested in learning more about neuronal metabolism and neurological decay related to energetic declines in the Pekkurnaz Lab of The School of Biological sciences. He is also a part of the UCSD Kendo team and enjoys doing art in his free time.



## Kai Ni

### ILLUSTRATOR, WEBMASTER

Kai is a third-year Data Science major at Muir College who has always had a passion for bringing ideas to life through design. At The Catalyst, Kai serves as the illustrator and webmaster, and contributes to developing the platform and brand of The Catalyst. Design is about connecting people with causes they care about, and Kai hopes to use his experience to help shine a spotlight on undergraduate research. Outside of The Catalyst, Kai is interested in the human experience in the digital landscape, specifically topics such as data privacy, digital rights, and cyber security. He is also heavily considering getting a cat.



## Kyra Fetter

### TECHNICAL EDITOR

Kyra is a second-year Bioengineering: Bioinformatics major in Warren College. As a Technical Editor, she is thrilled to collaborate with UCSD research scholars to celebrate the creativity and rigor of their research through the process of scientific writing and the peer review publishing process. Outside of The Catalyst, Kyra is excited to be investigating the 3D architecture of chromatin and its role in human disease in the Ay Lab at the La Jolla Institute for Immunology. She also enjoys distance running, exploring diverse cuisines, and propagating aerophytes.



## Aatash Pestonjamas

### TECHNICAL EDITOR, WEBMASTER

Aatash is a second-year Computer Engineering major who is passionate about helping others realize their potential. As a Technical Editor and Webmaster, he contributes to developing the platform of The Catalyst, and is excited to work with students throughout their editing process. Outside of The Catalyst, Aatash enjoys learning about Computer Hardware and Systems, and hopes to gain experience in developing and implementing them in various applications. He also enjoys biking and working on cars.



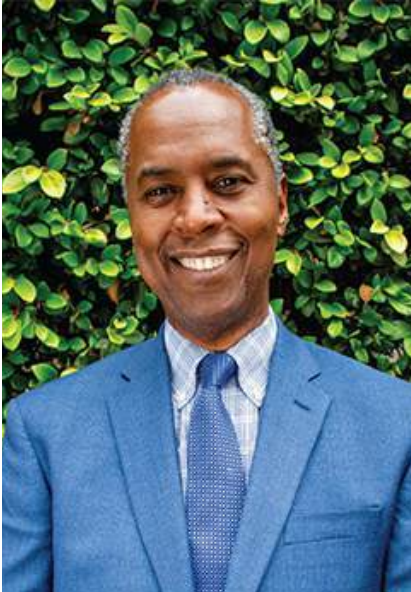
## Kevin Tan

### SECRETARY

Kevin is a second-year neurobiology major in Revelle College. As the secretary, he helps manage logistics and outreach initiatives. He hopes to help The Catalyst run smoothly so students can have the opportunity to publish their research. Outside of The Catalyst, Kevin studies the role of neural circuits in decision making in mice at the Komiyama lab. In his free time, Kevin enjoys practicing Kendo, and playing the piano.



# URH Advisors



## Dr. Artis

### DEAN OF UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH ADVANCEMENT

David Artis, PhD came to the Undergraduate Research Hub (formerly known as Academic Enrichment Programs or AEP) in November 2000, from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. There he had served as a faculty member, graduate school administrator and Director of Academic Services in the School of Public Health.

At UC San Diego, he has overseen steady growth in the number of the Undergraduate Research Hub (URH) programs and services, including coordinating more scholarship opportunities for students in all fields, increased participation in URH-sponsored undergraduate research conferences, and more collaborative program efforts with other campus units. Dr. Artis is a graduate of Yale and Stanford.



## Dr. Tsai Neri

### RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIPS COORDINATOR

Sophia Tsai Neri coordinates multiple programs within the Undergraduate Research Hub (URH). She has experience coordinating student-mentor matching, research scholarships, and helping students get more out of their research programs. She received her PhD from the University of Southern California (USC) in molecular biology doing x-ray crystallography, and her Bachelor of Science at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) studying cybernetics with an emphasis on bioinformatics. Prior to coming to UC San Diego, she was a postdoctoral scholar at UCLA.



## UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH HUB (URH)

The Undergraduate Research Hub empowers undergraduates seeking to become integrated in the UC San Diego research community with the skills to be successful in a post-baccalaureate career. URH's cooperative staff creates an environment for students to engage in research and leverage resources to maintain long-term relationships through high impact practices. URH welcomes students from diverse backgrounds seeking to maximize their student experiences and future opportunities.

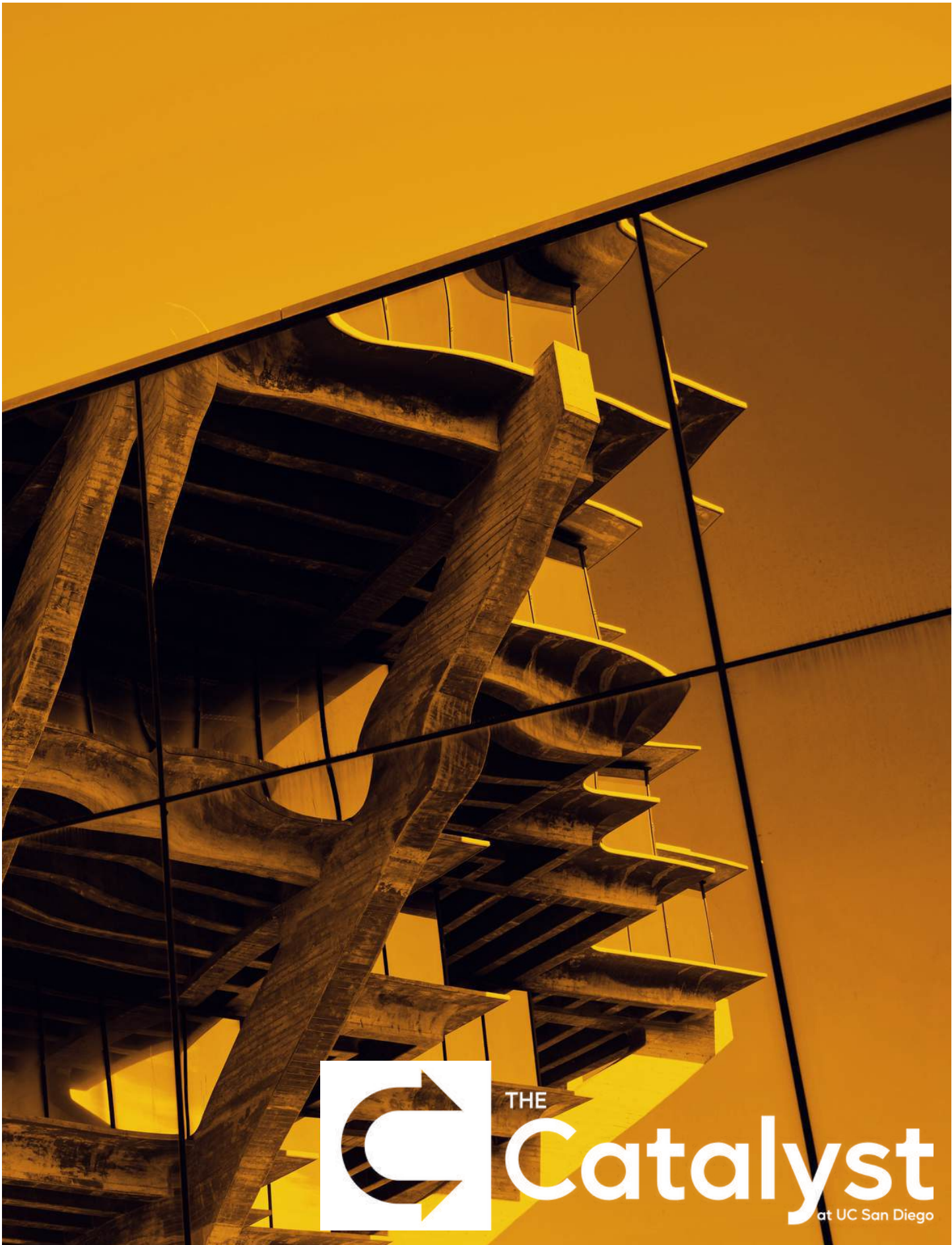
URH Website: <https://ugresearch.ucsd.edu/>

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