The "Weird Feeling" of School Shooting Alumni:
MSD Alum's Collective Identity and Community Consciousness in the DC Area

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Dedication

To all MSD alumni and those who have been impacted by gun violence in their communities.

Acknowledgments

Throughout my extensive academic career, there have been ups and downs. Still, I would not be where I am today without the assistance and guidance of my current and previous mentors in Sociology/Criminology, History, and Anthropology. I am extremely grateful to everyone who has been a part of my journey. My heartfelt appreciation goes to my thesis advisors, Dr. Daina Eglitis and Dr. Michelle Kelso. Without their guidance and mentorship, I would have never been able to execute the true potential of this study for the rest of the world to see. To Dr. Daina Eglitis, you have made me a more well-rounded researcher and writer by helping me find the sociological/criminological in theory and connect them to themes evident in my interviews. To Dr. Michelle Kelso, thank you for teaching me how to formulate my qualitative research for the first time, especially with the IRB process and creating a substantial interview questionnaire. This project would not have been possible without you and your encouragement throughout the entire process.

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Abstract of Thesis

The "Weird Feeling" of School Shooting Alumni:
MSD Alum's Collective Identity and Community Consciousness in the DC Area

This study examines the lives of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSD) alumni who live in the Washington, DC, area regarding their identities and community ties today. On February 14, 2018, MSD High School became the site of one of the most notorious school shootings in the United States. In the aftermath, MSD became nationally well-known due to the significant organizing effort of student survivors to combat gun violence and work toward gun control reform. From February until May 2024, 17 interviews were conducted in the DMV with MSD alumni who graduated between 1993 and 2016. I argue that alumni from a high school that became a household name after a horrific mass shooting share this collective experience and identity. I label this as a stigma and show that it is a common collective identity associated with secondary trauma that can be found among alumni from school shooting communities. Thus, this association of being a place where an infamous school shooting has happened led to this phenomenon of stigma, especially among MSD alumni. In this study, some themes evident include stigmatized identities based on their background, complicated feelings as graduates, and building and finding a sense of community outside their high school and hometown communities.

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Introduction

On February 14, 2018, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz walked onto the campus of Marjory Stoneman Douglas (known as MSD, Douglas, or Stoneman Douglas) High School in Parkland, Florida. Cruz, an alumnus of MSD, entered the Freshmen Building. At 2:21 pm, gunshots and the fire alarm rang out. Armed with an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, Cruz indiscriminately shot anyone in his line of sight. News channels descended on the scene, broadcasting clips of the school shooting as it unfolded. Many MSD alumni, residing from California to Texas to New York to Washington D.C., watched the coverage in horror as Cruz murdered 17 people and injured another 17 in a matter of seven minutes (BBC, 2022). Fourteen victims were high school students, alongside school staff, including an athletic director, a geography teacher, and an assistant football coach (Levenson and Sterling, 2022).[1] The word "Parkland" became synonymous with a brutal mass shooting, forever marking the community. Everyone knew about the "high school in Parkland, Florida" (Carlson, 2020, 103). However, the tragedy impacted not only the students and teachers at MSD, but also the community as a whole, including the residents of Parkland and nearby Coral Springs. Thousands of MSD alumni living near and far also felt the impact of the violence, linking the diaspora in ways they had never imagined.

This school shooting at MSD is not the only one that has happened in our nation. Instead, it is part of a bigger problem in American society, where gun violence in the form of mass shootings has become an almost daily occurrence. In turn, shootings have impacted many lives touched by those harmed or killed, including individuals in the community and those who have

[1] The 17 victims' names and ages of the MSD school shooting are Alyssa Alhadeff (14), Martin Duque Anguiano (14), Scott Beigel (35), Nicholas Dworet (17), Aaron Feis (37), Jamie Guttenberg (14), Chris Hixon (49), Luke Hoyer (15), Cara Loughran (14), Gina Montalto (14), Joaquin Oliver (17), Alaina Petty (14), Meadow Pollack (18), Helena Ramsay (17), Alex Schachter (14), Carmen Schentrup (16), and Peter Wang (15).

connections to the shooting location. At educational institutions where school shootings happen, this also includes the alumni or graduates of the school, such as those from MSD. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore how MSD alumni have been influenced in their lives, current communities, and identities by the infamous shooting at their high school. This will further our understanding of how school shootings impact their former students in other communities around the United States. Some of the main questions are: How had (if at all) the Parkland tragedy affected their work, education, or life path? How had they found a sense of community? In light of the MSD tragedy, how did they introduce themselves and their backgrounds to others? Did they feel like they were still a part of the Parkland community?[2]

The Washington DC area is just one of the major cities where many MSD alumni live. Some are former high school teachers, while others are graduates practicing their various professions in law, medicine, and advocacy for gun reform, among other careers. I chose to focus on the DMV for two reasons. Firstly, George Washington University is in Washington D.C., where the study is being supervised/conducted, and I live for the most part. Secondly, as an extended member of the Parkland community and MSD alum, I have a network of family, friends, and acquaintances who know of MSD alumni/graduates who reside in the DMV. Therefore, in the aftermath of the school shooting at MSD, I assert that there is a collective experience associated with alumni who live in the Washington DC area. Although alumni may have moved away from Florida to the DMV (i.e., DC-Maryland-Virginia), the tragedy has secondarily impacted them. It has created "weird," complicated emotions as graduates, feeling like their identity had a stigma due to being from the Parkland area and finding and building a

[2] In the paper, I will refer to the communities of Parkland and Coral Springs, either by their names, Parkland community, Parkland/Coral Springs, or the Parkland area, to refer to the community in the context of MSD.

sense of community in the DC area while still being connected to Parkland, Coral Springs, and MSD.[3]

By interviewing individuals who attended and graduated MSD alumni who reside in the DMV, the study shows how the tragedy has impacted their lives, collective identity and consciousness, aspects of their individual identity, and how they have integrated themselves into their communities today. Unfortunately, many Americans and their communities are more likely to be impacted by gun violence in the United States daily. It is imperative to look at the lives of people who may have been influenced by gun violence directly or indirectly, such as individuals who graduated from a school, since it continues to increase in our nation. In the DC area, this case study of MSD alumni describes and analyzes the experiences of alumni and how they may have been shaped by their relationship to MSD, even away from Parkland and Coral Springs.

[3] When talking about the DC-Maryland-Virginia area, I will refer to it as the DMV subsequently in the paper.

A Brief Historical Context of MSD, Parkland and Coral Springs

The cities of Coral Springs and Parkland are situated at the edge of the Florida Everglades. In the early 1960s, Fort Lauderdale architects James S. Hunt and Joe Taravella founded Coral Springs, and it was marketed toward families. It consists of twenty-four square miles. Parkland was established as a city in 1963, but the plan was to be a smaller town with farmland (Coral Springs, 2024). Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School was built to serve the area's residents, opening in 1990. Marjory Stoneman Douglas, the environmental protector of the Everglades and advocate for the Everglades National Park, inspired the name of the high school (Brandman, 2024).[4]

Even though both communities have continued to grow, in recent years, especially after the school shooting at MSD High School, Parkland has expanded significantly (Parkland, 2024). As mentioned, thousands of students have gone through MSD and graduated from this high school since its opening. However, it is imperative to state that MSD students came from the Parkland area, not just the town of Parkland. The high school is situated on the city lines between Parkland and Coral Springs, so students come from both communities. Generally speaking, Coral Springs and Parkland have diversity (i.e., racial and ethnic makeup) and household income differences among their communities. Both communities mainly consist of white (non-Hispanics), African Americans, and white (Hispanics) populations. Therefore, in 2022, the census reported that 36.4% of the population was white (non-Hispanic) compared to 23.6% of

[4] Ironically, many participants who went to MSD in its first years of operation expressed that Marjory Stoneman Douglas, the environmental activist, disliked the idea of the high school being named after her. She was trying to protect the Everglades from being built on, and the high school was built on this land. Emily, a woman who works in science policy and graduated from Stoneman Douglas in 1993, said: "I was there when she was still alive. And she hated [the] school. It was hysterical. Like, they brought her into a naming ceremony. She was super pissed off."

them being black or African American (non-Hispanic) in Coral Springs, while Parkland had a population of 57.4% white (non-Hispanic) compared to there only being 13.1% of the population who are black or African American (non-Hispanic) (DATA USA, 2022). In terms of household income, on average, Parklanders earn around $188,544, while those living in Coral Springs make around $87,488 (DATA USA, 2022). Hence, Parkland has been known as a more affluent, racially/ethnically white-centered city compared to Coral Springs, where there is more equal diversity between the white and black populations and have been known to earn much less in their households. In turn, these differences based on racial/ethnic treatment, opportunity, and financial stability became a common occurrence and point of contention among students.[5]

When MSD opened in the 1990s, students from Coral Springs were forced to transfer their existing high schools, like Coral Springs and J.P. Taravella High Schools, in Coral Springs to MSD.[6] This started the tension between Parkland and Coral Springs students based on their socioeconomic statuses. Throughout the years, another point of contention between students who are from either Parkland or Coral Springs was the value of academic success.[7] MSD is one

[5] Many participants who grew up in Coral Springs mentioned how they felt there were differences in relation to socioeconomic status and equality based on where they lived. Karen, a woman who works at a consulting firm and graduated from Douglas in 2011, expressed: "...I also grew up in a time [where there was] a huge rivalry between Parkland and Coral Springs, the towns…Parkland was being built because it's horse country, but people literally had stickers on the back of their cars. I'm sure you've seen them, said PHO, which [was] for Parkland homeowners like they were bragging that they owned homes in Parkland. There was like a big [rivalry] between that and then Westglades because we were zoned for Westglades. Crossings Middle was not a very good middle school, and it was the year that they rezoned, so there was a huge kind of rivalry between Coral Springs and Parkland. I don't know [the] reason. So it is definitely, I mean, now, I feel like it's different in Parkland…"

[6] Some students, including one of the interviewees, did not want to leave their high schools in Coral Springs and petitioned it, but ultimately failed and they had to attend MSD.

[7] For instance, Emily discussed how the integration of rigorous, hardworking academic-focused criteria and a competitive environment at Stoneman Douglas began when the school opened. She stated: "I wonder how much of that is from when it started. So when I went there, they were merging like two classes of high schoolers. They had to have every AP that both Taravellal and Coral Springs had. And if they didn't have them, they had to offer to send people back. So like, I know, people who took AP Chemistry at Taravella because they got less bang. But yeah, I think that's kind of one of the things that started that. Yeah, like [we had to have] way more AP classes than basically anything else in the area." Sadie, a woman who was a former prosecutor who graduated from Douglas in 2000, explained how the academic structure impacted your experience at Douglas. She said: "Especially with the kids in the same track as you, right? Like, if you were in the honors classes or the AP classes, you knew everybody [in] those classes."

of the best-known high schools in Florida and even nationally. According to U.S. News, MSD is ranked #1,185 due to their "performance on state-required tests, graduation, and how well they prepare students for college," such as 64% of their student body participating in "Advanced Placement (AP) coursework and exams" (U.S. News, 2024). Socioeconomic circumstances and academic rigor have impacted the composition and feelings of MSD students.[8]

MSD has been and continues to be composed of teenagers from Coral Springs/Parkland but is not necessarily acknowledged by people outside of the South Florida community. Even though there may be issues based on whether Stoneman Douglas students lived in Parkland or Coral Springs and qualms of the high school, there appears to be a sense of unity among the communities concerning the school shooting. It did not matter that Douglas was technically located in Parkland. On the first anniversary, there was an art project built in Coral Springs, known as "The Temple of Time," that "served as a gathering place" for the community to "leave [behind their] sadness and grief" following the tragedy and was burned ceremonially to represent this (Muñoz, 2019). This means that when the school shooting at MSD happened in 2018, it not only impacted Parklanders but also those living in Coral Springs.

[8] Lance, a former member of the military who attended Stoneman Douglas in 2004 discussed how the academic environment did not coincide with Parkland students understanding the poor socioeconomic situations of many Coral Springs students at MSD. He explained: "For me, being in like the late 90s, early 2000s. A lot of the guys and gals that I hung out with [weren't] necessarily discussing how to get into university there. We're predominantly talking about, you know, 'Hey, what are we doing? [Where] are we hanging out at or whatever, right?' The girlfriend of the guy that was like the cool guy would probably be talking about college. So [there's] definitely some similarities, but there's also some changes but like everything, it's [an] environment and like who you hung out with definitely determined your exposure to more than Coral Springs more than Parkland."

Parkland Insider & Criminologist and Sociologist Researcher

Before going into the literature review, I must tell my story, connection, and reasoning behind why I felt compelled to conduct this research study. In 2005, when I was seven years old, I moved from Weston, Florida, to Parkland, Florida. For the rest of my childhood, I lived in Parkland and attended all of the schools in the area, including MSD, from which I graduated in 2016. I spent eleven years being immersed in the community every day. As an alum and community member, this topic of secondary trauma and its impact on alumni is extremely close to my heart since I understand how the community has been impacted by the school shooting. It had not even been two years since I had graduated from Douglas when the tragedy occurred. I went to high school with at least half of the student body who were there the day of the terrible event. For instance, as a senior at Stoneman Douglas, I ate lunch outside at the art pavilion with David Hogg, well-known as being a gun control activist and one of the founders of March For Our Lives, who was a normal teenage boy at the time. Since undergrad and during grad school, I have come back home to Parkland, Florida, for my winter, spring, and summer breaks since my family still lives in the sub-community of Heron Bay. For at least four months out of the year, I still am immersed in the Parkland community and lifestyle. When I am home, I constantly pass by MSD and the memorial by the school's sign out front and see the fenced-up 1200 building where the school shooting mainly took place (recently, it has been demolished). In addition, from my parents, sister, and grandma, and family friends and their children, I know how some of its current or previous community members may feel about the tragedy since they still live there, like my family friends or friends who have moved away are affected by their old high school being the site of a mass shooting, respectively. Thus, Parkland will always be my home.

Through the media and firsthand accounts of students, teachers, staff, parents, and community members, most members of American society know how those in the MSD, Parkland, and Coral Springs communities were directly or indirectly affected by the tragedy on that day. Following the school shooting, MSD high school students spoke out for gun control reform, started the March For Our Lives Movement in response, and marched in Washington D.C., on March 24, 2018, to fight for the cause (Raphelson and Bowman, 2018). It was not only current members of the MSD, Parkland, and Coral Springs community who helped with the planning and attending of the march and protest, but also hundreds of MSD alumni from across the country and, especially, the DMV area.

This is not to say that the MSD alumni have experienced the same degree of trauma as those who were at the high school and community at the time of the tragedy. However, many MSD alumni still perceive the Parkland area as their hometown and part of their community. Thus, they have been impacted by the school shooting as a secondary trauma. Furthermore, their stories have never been examined about how being from Parkland, Coral Springs, and attending/graduating MSD may have influenced their lives since the horrific event. So, why not study and understand the secondhand trauma and influence of the tragedy of MSD alumni on their identities? As well, there are graduates of other schools and universities that have had a school shooting, like Columbine High School, Sandy Hook Elementary School, and Robb Elementary School. Hence, as a researcher, I am curious as to whether they have felt and experienced similar things, such as having secondary trauma, and if it may have caused a stigmatized identity, as well. All of these reasons have made me keen to understand the experiences and narratives of my fellow MSD alumni in this case study.

Literature Review

In this section, there will be an examination of three main bodies of literature: 1) secondary trauma in communities, 2) studies on school shooting communities, and 3) collective identity in communities that encounter trauma. This existing research is imperative to setting the stage for this study and why we need to comprehend the stories, life experiences, and influence school shootings have on alumni, such as in the case of MSD. Unlike previous academic publications, my study contributes to the literature by highlighting that graduates experience secondary trauma being from a school and community that experienced a school shooting, investigating indirect communities impacted by gun violence, and showing how they share a collective identity based on their association with the Parkland community. After exploring the literature, I will explain how existing sociological frameworks and theories on the Concentric Zone Model, stigma, and "second consciousness" fit and are redefined with my research.

Secondary Trauma in Communities

As discussed, there have been communities that have experienced traumatic events or experiences that have had ripple effects not only on those who were directly involved but also on those indirectly impacted. This is known as a secondary trauma. According to licensed clinical psychologist Dr. Sabrina Romanoff, secondary trauma is defined as "a type of trauma [caused] by indirectly experiencing a traumatic event (typically by hearing details or witnessing the outcome of a traumatic experience)" (Harmon and Davis, 2023). In the past, vicarious trauma has been referred to professionals who have worked with individuals or groups who have dealt with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), like doctors, first responders, or therapists. Most

literature argues how the "helping" professionals aid in the rehabilitation of those who deal with PTSD firsthand and become traumatized themselves and how there must be systems in place to protect them (Ellis and Knight, 2021, 3559; Koerth, 2022). Other publications have focused on how the media and news reporters who cover these horrific tragedies, like mass shootings, become at risk for trauma, especially from a secondary perspective. Similar to the "helping" professionals, research centering on the journalists and reporters emphasizes the need for "adequate trauma preparedness and support" for those "in the newsroom" (Seely, 2017, iii). The findings highlight a mental health approach for those covering and aiding in the coping of a community impacted by a tragic event, such as a mass shooting.

Health Affairs, a peer-reviewed healthcare journal, states that "school shootings leave physical, mental, and emotional wounds that affect students, school staff, families, and communities for years following [the] incident" (Iancu et al., 2019). However, this secondary trauma is not only impacting health-related professionals who deal with the survivors of a school shooting but also anyone who has ties to the community, including the school's graduates/alumni. Dr. Sandro Galea, an epidemiologist who co-published a review on the impact of mental health from mass shootings, expressed how "there's lots of evidence that [people] can have their mental health impacted by traumatic events even if they weren't personally in physical danger [due to] watching media images of people suffering" (Koerth, 2022). There have been some academic publications studying the influence "on the mental health of indirectly exposed individuals, such as those who are not direct witnesses but live within the communities where these shootings occur" (Soni and Tekin, 2020, 4). For instance, Deb and Gangaram (2021) explored how school shootings have affected the mental health and behaviors of middle and high

school students who have been impacted by mass shootings as adults, including those who lived in counties and were not at the school at the time of the tragedy (Deb and Gangaram, 2021, 1-2).

Nevertheless, there have not been studies that emphasize the trauma being indirect and secondary for alumni of a school that has experienced a shooting. This secondary community trauma literature is not limited to mass or school shootings but to any event that may instigate a trauma response, like a terrorist attack (i.e., 9/11, Boston Marathon Bombing, etc.) or a natural disaster (i.e., forest fires, earthquakes, or even Hurricane Katrina; Abba-Aji et al., 2024, 94; and Gill, 2007). It can even come in the form of intergenerational trauma, such as the children of genocide survivors (i.e., Jewish descendants of Holocaust survivors) (American Psychological Association, 2023; Forster et al., 2020; Hirst and Echterhoff, 2008; Jacobs, 2014; and Wayne and Zhukov, 2022). Therefore, secondary collective trauma that community members experience from a school shooting, either directly or indirectly, is bound to have a similar collective identity influenced by the tragedy.

School Shooting Community Studies

Besides literature emphasizing how to prevent secondary trauma for mental health professionals and the media, most research related to school shooting communities has focused on the trauma of those individuals directly impacted by the tragedy and how to help them cope with their grief and heal as a community, such as Duffey et al. (2020) and Degloma (2009). Levy et al. (2004) explored how the trauma of the school shooting at Columbine High School in 1999 affected its community in the immediate aftermath and long term and how psychological interventions have been used to help its community members. Similar studies are all related to the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) influenced communities that were

impacted by gun violence, like the less publicized two different high school shootings in San Diego's East County in March 2001 (Palinkas et al., 2004).

Mainly, they assert the trauma inflicted on a specific community can expand over time, especially in the case of mass shootings and the increased news coverage of them (Degloma, 2009, 105; and Soni and Tekin, 2020, 3). Furthermore, they highlight how the communities must expect these mental health predicaments, such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD, in their community members and have capital and resources available to anyone who may be suffering (Abba-Aji et al., 2024; Deb and Gangaram, 2021; and Duffey et al., 2020). For instance, in the aftermath of the MSD, Broward County reported an increase in the possession or use of drugs by their high schoolers due to "the health, health-related behavior[,] and human capital outcomes of [being] exposed" to a school shooting (Deb and Gangaram, 2021, 1).

In addition, the majority of academics examining the direct impact of school shooting communities do not have any personal connection to the specific community. An exception is the recent publication of doctoral student Jessica Cherry's dissertation from May 2024, where she highlighted her experience as someone from Newtown, Connecticut, on the day of the Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012 and how ten members of the Newtown/Sandy Hook community coped and communicated their narratives of grief eleven years after the tragedy (Cherry, 2024). She found that depending on the individual's "interpersonal connections within the community, political involvement, and barriers to coping" determined how likely they were to communicate and be part of the communal coping process (Cherry, 2024, 58-60). Hence, the disciplines of social psychology, psychology in general, medicine, and communication studies have been the areas of study where direct communities traumatized by school shootings have previously been studied. They have not entirely explored an indirect viewpoint and link to the

school shooting community from sociological and criminological perspectives, including the school that has experienced a shooting's alumni or graduates.

Collective Identity in Community Traumas

The majority of sociological literature connected to communities who have experienced trauma focuses on their social, collective identity. According to Tajfel (1978), collective identity is the "part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, 84). Furthermore, it will elicit a sense of "we-ness" where there is a "[collectivity recognized among different social actors]" (Snow, 2001, 2). Thus, collective identity is a shared sense of self.

Some research suggests that collective memory, like one's national, political, or ethnic identity, shapes one's specific experience (Zubrzycki and Woźny, 2020, 177). For instance, the Holocaust and how Jews today who are descendants of Holocaust survivors may feel more traumatized when there are acts of Anti-Semitism since it emulates intergenerational trauma based on this collective memory. However, this collectivity is not limited to the past and a group's memory but the collective identity of a group of people who may have directly or indirectly been influenced by a traumatic event, like a mass shooting.

Duffey et al. (2020) expressed that any community "[ravaged by natural disasters, or] terroristic acts of violence, mass shootings, and other violently abusive acts" have this "[trauma-bond of] interconnectedness and shared experience unlike any other" that only they understand (Duffey et al., 2020, 227). The Parkland/Coral Springs communities faced trauma due to the school shooting that happened at MSD High School. In turn, it has created this distinct "social

context" of association and identity for both communities and the high school, and how the rest of the nation has viewed anyone from the area, such as having a stigmatized identity due to their connection to the area (Olick and Robbins, 1998, 106). These experiences happen among MSD alumni and graduates who were not present at the time of the school shooting because they are still interconnected to this Parkland community experience. The next section will sociologically and criminologically examine theories on how collective identity may be influenced by the stigma label of being indirectly from a traumatized community.

Theoretical Frameworks

Besides focusing on the social collective identity of secondary traumatized communities related to health professionals and the media, the psychological aftermath, interventions, and narratives of direct victims and survivors of school shootings, there has been little literature and theoretical frameworks focusing on individuals who were once part of communities (the exception being the Deb and Gangaram (2021) study on the county) and were not at the school the time of the shooting. There has not been an examination of how these individuals not present at the school or community feel and were influenced, such as alumni who attended and graduated from these schools before the horrific event. It has been not only academia that had not studied alumni of schools where shootings had taken place when they were not in the community or at the school at the time but also the general media. Most publications and scholarly work have emphasized students, teachers, staff, parents, and community members who were directly impacted on the day of the shooting (i.e., the victims, their families and friends, and the survivors). What about individuals who were not there on the day of the shooting but still felt the impact of the tragedy? It is not improbable that most children will leave their hometowns and communities when they leave for college and find a job. Are they expected not to feel the same sadness, anger, and fear that their communities felt when a shooting happened at their old high school?

More literature and theoretical frameworks need to emphasize studying the broader community where school shootings take place, similar to how we perceive urban sociology with sociologist Ernest Burgess' Concentric Zone Model in 1925 and juvenile delinquency in Chicago with American sociologists and criminologists Clifford R. Shaw's and Henry D. McKay in 1942.

In the Concentric Zone Model, there are five zones in a city: 1) the center of the city where the factories are; 2) the transitional zone where the poor and immigrants live that work in the factories; 3) the working class neighborhoods where families reside; 4) the middle-class family living area; and 5) the commuter zone (Burgess, 1925). The poorer populations are concentrated towards the center of the city, which in criminology coincides with why there is a large number of juveniles who engage in delinquency and crime in this city center compared to the outer concentric zones (Shaw and McKay, 1942).

I argue we can use a concentric zone model to discuss and analyze the impact of school shootings on the geographic and demographic communities in which they take place, such as in the case of MSD. It highlights the outreach that gun violence and the tragedy have on the rest of society in general by showing: 1) the location of the school shooting (aka the elementary, middle, high schools, or universities); 2) the victims; 3) the survivors; 4) the direct community; and 5) community members outside of the direct community (including those who may live in different cities and outside the state).[9] It would help to explain the ripple effect of a school shooting in a community and on a broader scale, such as to illustrate how MSD alumni who live outside of Parkland/Coral Springs may have been influenced from a sociological and criminological perspective. The trauma of the school shooting works its way outward from the center of the concentric zone, which impacts anyone connected to the school and community (See Figure 1). Furthermore, the direct and indirect trauma inflicted on all parties touched by the school shooting are not the only things evident in this School Shooting Concentric Zone Model but also stigma.

[9] During my initial planning for the study, I talked with social psychologist and GWU professor, Phillip J. Moore about this victim-survivor-community concentric zone model.

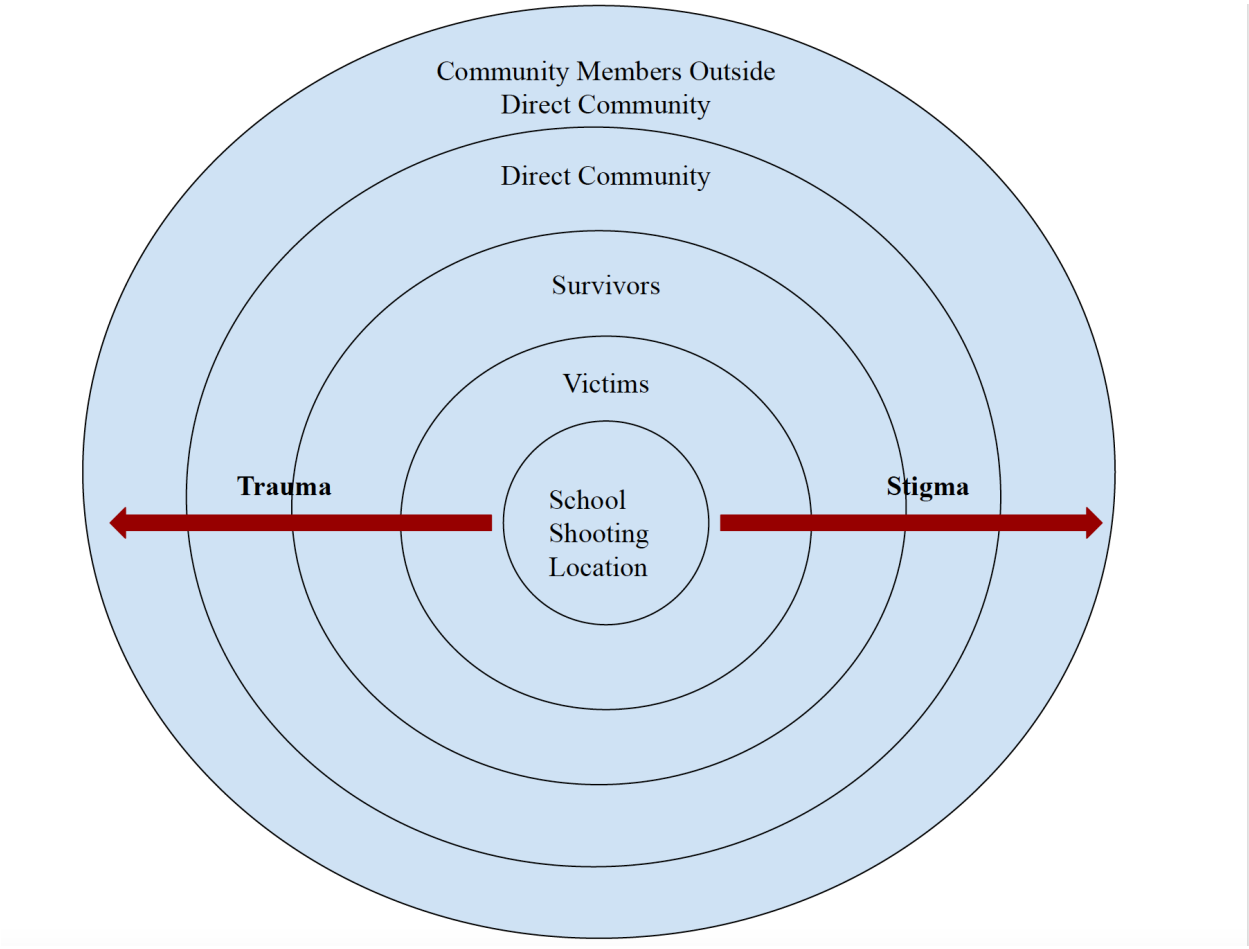

Figure 1: School Shooting Concentric Zone Model

Whether or not mainstream society or academia has acknowledged it, individuals who are from communities where mass and school shootings occur or who attended/graduated from the schools may have issues with their identity and sense of consciousness due to stigma based on being from a community where gun violence happened and was unexpected. In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), sociologist and social psychologist Erving Goffman explained that for people to feel like they belong in society, they must have an acceptable social

identity. If someone has a trait or attribute, either physical, mental, or a "tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion" that goes against the norms of society and others become aware of it, they become stigmatized and feel alienated by others in regards to Goffman's iteration (Goffman, 1963, 4). This is the classical interpretation of stigma and its influence on one's identity, according to Goffman's theory.

In this work, I suggest that stigmatization does not necessarily need to be based on physical traits or ethnicity, but if they come from a community that has been marked due to a specific reason, either negative or positive, event, or stereotype (Quinn and Earnshaw, 2013, 1). It can be a stigma associated with individuals being from communities where school shootings have occurred. As shown with the School Shooting Concentric Zone Model, stigma stretches across the concentric zones because it is rooted in an attachment marker of the trauma. In this study, stigma arises toward MSD alumni from them saying, "I'm from Parkland," and others having the immediate association of a mass shooting. It is not a stigma based on rejection or ostracism, but rather a stigmatization that shifts the viewpoint from the individual to the event and then being marked by it. Hence, this self-introduction of stating, "I'm from Parkland," can be interpreted as an invitation to ask questions about the mass shooting.

In this case, unless someone attaches themselves or their identity to this specific community or school, they remain "hidden" (as Goffman expressed it) from the rest of society. Nevertheless, the "hiding" is not to avoid rejection but to mainly abstain from this shift of focus and narrative to inquiries about the school shooting, such as with MSD. In the context of school shooting communities and their members, once they reveal this Parkland connection, a stigma label "[psychologically] shapes [their] micro-level [interactions]" and sociologically, their "collective responses" as a group, which this study will examine (Clair, 2018, 1-2).

Furthermore, after this horrific event, these individuals understand that they have this second part of their identity that they may choose to hide from others due to social stigma or be open about it with the people around them, depending on the circumstance (Crocker et al., 1998). It is due to their sense of consciousness based on their connection to Parkland, which is related to the concept of "double consciousness" created by American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois. In his context, Du Bois uses "double consciousness" to refer to the Black experience in the United States. He claimed that African Americans are socially stigmatized since there is "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" besides their own due to the color of their skin (Du Bois, 1903, 7). It emphasizes the perspective of seeing oneself through the dominant lens, in this case, the lens of the white race, and then through their own experiences, which highlights the tensions between the hegemonic white view and individual perception and experiences.

According to the traditional interpretation of "double consciousness," Du Bois understood it to illustrate the "twoness" of the African American experience where they are both "American" and "Black," which creates this internal and external "strife" to be accepted into mainstream American society (Du Bois, 1903, 7-8). They face this "twoness" where they individually experience the world, which is contextualized by how society perceives them based on their race. However, this perspective of seeing yourself through your lens and being socialized in another light is not only exclusive to someone's race but to those who may have a stigmatized identity due to their connection with a devastating event. For our context, this "double consciousness" is not an ascribed status, like someone's race, sex/gender, religion, ethnicity, or age. It is a community identity rooted in a particular experience, such as the case of alumni or graduates from a school that has experienced a shooting.

For these alumni/graduates, this “second consciousness” is deciding whether to specifically identify as someone from the community or not, such as saying, “I’m from Parkland, Florida,” to avoid the stigma associated with it by outsiders. Those a part of the Parkland, Coral Springs, and MSD communities understand that the dominant lens for Americans is that those linked to school shooting communities and mention it in their self-introduction are willing to answer questions surrounding it. Nevertheless, these individual members of the communities have to grapple with their feelings, thoughts, emotions, and experiences, on whether they feel comfortable in stating, “I’m from Parkland, Florida,” and the possible responses they may receive. It can be a difficult situation for anyone from these communities to decide how to self-identify since they are community members feeling the ripple effect of this school shooting concentric circle. These frameworks of stigmatization and double consciousness of one's identity are influential in understanding how the collective identity of an extended part of a community forms when it may be associated with a negative tragic event.

Methodology

For this research study, I chose to focus on the DC region for two reasons. The first is that DC is my current place of residence and the second because numerous MSD alumni live in the DMV.[10] [11] As a member of the Parkland diaspora, I was able to tap into a network of alumni and teachers who moved to the area to begin this research. I chose to employ interviews as my methodology as a means of understanding and examining how people conceptualize and make sense of their lives and the world around them. Within the MSD alumni diaspora, my "insider" position provides legitimacy, comfortability, and trust for members connected to this community since I am perceived as their "social equal" who comes from the same area and has dealt with the aftermath of school shooting as well (Platt, 1981, 76). Thus, I believed they would feel safe, understood, and not judged for their responses (i.e., whether they had positive or negative experiences at MSD and in Coral Springs/Parkland). In this case study, I seek to answer the following research questions: How has the tragedy affected the self-identification of Parklanders? How have their lives been influenced by gun violence? How do Parklanders who have left the area seek out the community with other MSD alumni?

To answer these questions, I developed an interview protocol, which was approved by GW's Office of Human Research (See the Appendices for the interview protocol/questionnaire, informed consent form, documentation of consent, and participant profile summary). I used two criteria to screen respondents of MSD alumni/graduates: they had to live in the DMV area or

[10] I have a widespread network of friends and acquaintances that I know have left the South Florida area. I will also say that as the primary researcher I choose the Washington DC area opposed to Parkland or Coral Springs because at the moment I live in the DMV and I have met alumni and heard about a lot of other alumni in the area as well.
[11] The majority of the study's participants discussed this in their interviews by stating that their parents, siblings, and friends who they went to MSD High school have left Parkland and Coral Springs where they grew up.

relatively close to it, as well as be over the age of eighteen. I found most participants through social media, a few from acquaintances, and others were recommended by friends or family who knew of MSD alumni residing in the area. All participants I found on social media came from one of two Facebook groups: MSD Alums in the DC area (Mid-Atlantic) or Mobilizing MSD Alumni-MEMBER FORUM. In turn, I contacted both groups' administrators for their approval to reach out to their members. Once they consented, I messaged potential participants who fit the study's criteria via the Messenger feature on Facebook.

Together, 17 respondents, women and 3 men, participated in this research.[12] All had previously lived in either Parkland or Coral Springs and graduated from MSD between 1993 and 2016 (except for three participants, as mentioned previously). There were no interviewees who were present at MSD during the school shooting since they attended the high school before then. Nevertheless, all participants experienced the effects of tragedy to some extent, as they expressed this to the interviewer during the study. Thus, I chose to use pseudonyms instead of Participant #1, #2, #3, etc., not only for confidentiality but also to allow the personal connection between the interviewee and me to come through in the interviews.

The interviews took place from mid-February to the beginning of May 2024, either in person, on the GWU Zoom Platform, or via phone call. The questionnaire consisted of structured, open-ended questions relating to these topics: how long they lived in Parkland/Coral Springs; when they left the community; if the MSD tragedy affected their life paths or career; a sense of community in the DC area; introductions before vs. after the tragic event; if they feel

[12] It is important to note that three of my interviewees did not graduate from MSD, but they did attend this high school for a long time. They decided to transfer due to personal reasons. When I was in contact with them before the interview, they never once mentioned that they did not graduate from MSD, even when the study explicitly states that it pertains to "MSD alumni." I am unsure if they had a different interpretation of "alumni" as meaning attended. However, they are still included in the study since their stories and experiences are relevant to the lives of MSD students and the evolution of the high school before the tragedy.

like an extension of the Parkland area community; and what the community means to them today.[13] Most interviews were between 30 and 45 minutes in length and audio recorded.[14]

All of the interviews were transcribed, either through the GWU Zoom Platform or Otter.ai, and then were reviewed in conjunction with the audio recordings for correctness and clarity. After the transcriptions, each interview was analyzed and coded for thematic similarities related to identity, stigmatization of identity, collective consciousness, and sense of community in conjunction with theoretical understandings to support them. The summarized findings are discussed in the next section.

[13] During the interviews, additional follow-up or new questions were asked if the interviewer wanted clarity or more information from the participant.
[14] These two interviews were around an hour or so in length.

Findings & Discussion

The qualitative findings presented here illustrate how the lives of MSD alumni in the DC area have been influenced by their experiences and connections to MSD High School, the Parkland community, and the tragedy. Throughout the interviews, three main themes became apparent: 1) stigmatization based on introductions before vs. after the tragedy; 2) "weird feelings" as alumni from a high school that experienced a school shooting; and 3) being an extension of the Parkland area and MSD communities and finding a sense of community in the DC area. Significantly, my findings suggest that being from "Parkland" shifted from a geographic location, a part of one's history, to a component of one's identity after the school shooting at MSD. In turn, this is a potential source of stigma for those who have identities associated with the Parkland area.

Identity Stigma

One of the most common patterns that arose during interviews was how MSD alumni introduced themselves to new people, acquaintances, and colleagues, both before and after the MSD school shooting. Before and after the tragedy, most people would stray away from saying, "I'm from Parkland," but for different reasons. Prior to the tragedy, Parklanders did not say they were from there because it was a small town hidden in the large county of Broward County. Instead, they would answer like Hailey, a female 2013 graduate, expressed:

> "Now the [time] pre-shooting, anytime somebody asked me, 'Where am I from?' I'd say like, 'Oh, like a suburb of Fort Lauderdale,' like, unless they were [a Floridian] and I'd be like, 'Oh, South Florida or something like that."

The reasoning behind this was that no one knew about Parkland unless they were from South Florida, and even before the shooting, some people still had no clue about the city. For instance, Derek, a male 2013 graduate, would tell people: "...I'm from Fort Lauderdale because Parkland's not on the map, and who knows that place?" If anything, people were more likely to explain to others that they lived in Coral Springs than Parkland because it was that much of a small town before the school shooting, and Coral Springs was more known.

In the aftermath of the school shooting, these participants worried whether saying they were from South Florida or near the Fort Lauderdale area would further probe where in the South Florida area they lived, specifically that by expressing Parkland, they would automatically be affiliated with the community rocked by a school shooting. If they said they were from Parkland or the immediate surrounding area, there was a conscious worry of being stigmatized by others due to negative association. It is not the normal stigma that Goffman focused on, whether there would be ostracism or rejection, but one where they are marked by the tragedy and are a spokesperson for it, even as alumni. For example, they would have to anticipate others' reactions, such as being ready to answer questions about the tragic event, if it impacted them, or if they knew any victims or survivors. It was a fear of the stigma label being placed on their identity if they did say, "I'm from Parkland," and the inherent role that came with it. Amy, a female 2009 graduate, stated this point of view:

"Yeah, sometimes it's hard because I'll say, 'Oh, I'm from South Florida,' even now and then, people will ask. And then I always hesitate because…every time you say Parkland, and they're like, 'Oh, [did you go to] Douglas?' But I also [don't] wanna be rude when people ask so like I'll start with South Florida, and then, if they ask again, then I'll say it. And then they ask if I went to Douglas. And then I say, yeah, and you know, like, it's like a whole thing. I definitely am more aware of it now, I guess. Like you know, before, if people would ask after, 'Oh, I never heard of it.' And that would just kind of be the end of it."

She was not the only participant who voiced this concern and mentioned what may happen by saying they are from Parkland. For instance, Hailey stated that she was perceived as the "girl who went to the school where the school shooting happened" by older white men at her job. This incident happened when she chose to divulge where she was from specifically, so now she does not start with Parkland.

Throughout most interviews, the participants expressed their caution and deduction skills if they mentioned they were from Parkland or Coral Springs and they attended/graduated from MSD after the tragedy. No one wants any negative association to be linked to their name because they are more than where they came from, especially as alumni who were not there at the time of the tragedy. This emulates the idea of "stigma," which they have to take into account when they are deciding whether to "hide" their hometown identity as one of their traits by determining how those around them will react and how they may feel about sharing and the possible future conversations that may arise from it. If they obscure a part of their identity during a self-introduction or among colleagues or acquaintances, it is not in fear of rejection or ostracism but to avoid this dominant lens shift on questions relating to the school shooting. In the context of alumni who attended and graduated from a school that experienced a school shooting, it is reminiscent of Goffman's theory on stigma since it focuses on deciding whether to hide or reveal their identity for stigmatization concerns. Furthermore, it illustrates Du Bois' idea of "double consciousness" because MSD alumni have an awareness of how mainstream society perceives Parklanders as objects of curiosity and their own feelings and experiences being from the Parkland area.

Nonetheless, it is imperative to mention how the rivalries between Parkland and Coral Springs, discussed in the historical background context section, influenced whether they felt

identity stigmatization. Coral Springs was a community impacted by the MSD school shooting, but it was not the exact town where the school was located. Thus, there was less association with Parkland and expression of stigma label on their identity since it was not their hometown to most of them: Coral Springs was. In most instances (unless they worked in politics, law, or nonprofits connected to gun control reform as their means of capital by profession choice), they kept their background of where they were from as vague as possible to protect themselves and their identities from this social stigma.

"Weird" Feelings As MSD Alumni

Another common pattern was the "weird feeling," or disconnect MSD alumni feel when thinking about the tragedy and themselves. Sarah, an attorney who works in telecommunications regulatory law and a Douglas graduate of 2014, discussed the mental and internal struggles she dealt with in the aftermath of the school shooting:

"...I was just trying to get through [it and take my classes]. So, it was kind of a very chaotic few months. Let alone like, even having to like, go sit in the classroom was really hard, like the first few weeks afterward. And especially after, like starting law school, too, because I don't know, it was just like an unfamiliar. Like, I don't know, the classrooms in Georgetown Law are just like […] not a lot of exits kind of thing. And so, I would just get freaked out sometimes."

Furthermore, she attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) as an undergrad. After the recent school shooting at UNC, these feelings reemerged:

"And that was really, really tough for me. And I don't think I realized how tough it was until [it] happened. And that really, like, brought out a lot just like seeing the news coverage, hearing all the rumors, it was like the same. It was like reliving [the] same stuff. And so that was really tough. Yeah, but yeah, I do feel like it did like it affected me. Like I know, there's a difference. It's like secondary. And I feel like a lot of us probably have dealt with that. Because Parkland is

such a well-connected area. Everyone knows somebody [or has] some sort of experience or remember someone exactly. And so, it's hard for it to just not affect you in some way. And like, really put yourself in that place. And you know, yeah, when it happened, I was four years out, but in the grand scheme of things."

As Sarah expressed in her interview, MSD alumni feel conflicted about acknowledging the mark the school shooting left on them. Are they allowed to feel sad to the same extent as the victims, survivors, and community members who were in the area on that fateful day? Do they feel connected to their younger MSD alumni? As discussed in the theoretical frameworks section, there should be a concentric zone model for communities that have experienced school shootings because a horrific event impacts not only the survivors, victims, and their families but also the immediate communities and anyone who is or has been a part of the community. This includes alumni or graduates of a school that has had a mass shooting, like all MSD alumni in South Florida and abroad (See Figure 2). Thus, there must be an awareness of the secondary trauma inflicted on others not directly involved in the school shooting (apart from the "helping" professionals mentioned in the literature review section) as well.

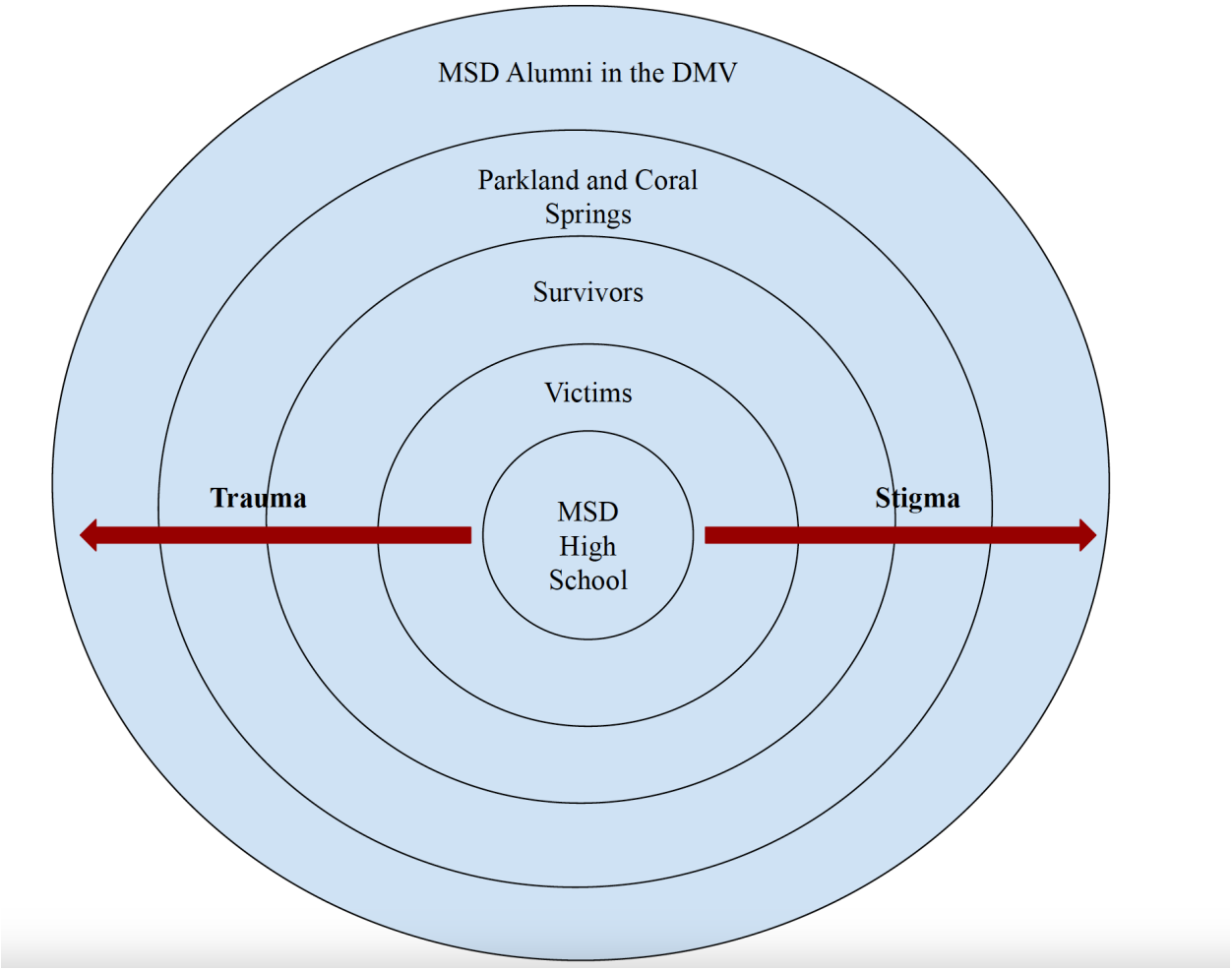

Figure 2: MSD High School Shooting Concentric Zone Model

Related to this hesitation associated with MSD alumni mentioning they are from Parkland, Derek discussed how bringing up Parkland "...makes the conversation gloomy. People apologize to you for some reason that I think is well-intended but feels bizarre. Yeah, like people don't know how to respond. I'm from Parkland. I went to Douglas, you know," but was not present at the time of the shooting. In turn, it creates this "weird" sentiment among MSD alumni. For them, this is the feeling of secondary trauma as graduates and extended members of the community where a school shooting took place, supporting the School Shooting Concentric Zone Model, even though they were not at the high school during the tragedy, as discussed by Sarah.

Furthermore, Derek expressed how if he introduced himself as being from Parkland, it brought this “gloomy” nature to his conversations since he became known as the guy who went to the high school where a school shooting occurred. It illustrates how he had to weigh the decision as to whether to state he is from Parkland or not based on this “second consciousness” of what mainstream society thought about this school shooting community and his personal feelings as an MSD alum and Parklander. Similarly, it emphasizes how Derek had to determine whether he wanted to face stigma on his identity with possible inquiries by others based on the town’s association with a notorious school shooting as well.

Some of the other responses that allude to this “weird” feeling manifestation and theoretical constructs of how communities and individuals are affected by their feelings and reactions to their hometown and old high school undergoing a school shooting include:

Hailey (Female 2013 graduate): “I mean, I think it's something that affects everybody who's been touched by it. And I can't say for sure if it's affected [my life path. I was not living there]. So it's the whole like, This is my home, but also not my home. [It’s a] weird feeling about the whole thing.”

Jake (Male graduate 2015): “And I think, for me, it's important to talk about it because we're in a weird, unique position where we're not technically affected by it. But we also all kind of [were], even if we weren't there, you know?”

The majority of the participants voiced their sadness and spoke of the heaviness that weighed on them when they learned that the high school they attended was the site of a school shooting. The overall consensus among the interviewees was that they were upset, but they felt it was less tragic for them since they did not experience the tragedy. Hence, it was more of vicarious or secondary trauma, depending on the individual. Lacey, a female 1998 graduate, expressed this sentiment of the “weird feeling” for her:

"...Everybody's hit a little bit differently. Like if you knew people that were affected, it probably hit you a little bit differently. Like, I didn't have that type of association. Yeah, my association was to the school. I wasn't [there]. So it was one of those things that felt weird. Like I was there, I was in those classrooms, like I played on that soccer field. My parents lived in town. That was the part that was weird. But the other stuff wasn't relatable to me. I mean, I'm forty-one years old. So it's like one of those things. When that happened, I think my daughter was two, like, I had other things I had to do, you know, it was just a different phase in my life."

She discussed the difficulty in knowing that the places where she played soccer, her parents lived, and the campus that she walked upon had been tainted by gun violence. For her and other MSD alumni who had not been in the community since the 1990s and 2000s, MSD and the Parkland communities were no longer as they remembered. Their identity and consciousness of themselves are not as closely attached to their high school selves as much as those individuals who were current students or recent graduates at the school during the school shooting.

Many interviewees described the disconnect between themselves and other MSD students and alumni based on generational, life, and high school experiences and dynamics, such as varying socioeconomic statuses between those from Parkland and Coral Springs. For them, this "weird feeling" that is repeatedly mentioned still exists, but they still feel that the tragedy has affected anyone with ties to the Florida communities or MSD High School, as discussed by Jake. No one can erase connections and emotions linked to their hometown and old high school since these places shaped the very fabric of their identities as children and young adults. However, they are not worried about them impacting their social identity due to the stigma associated with the Parkland area or their sense of self as individuals and within their communities in the DMV.

Finding Community in the DC Area & Leaving the Parkland Area Community

Even though all participants have moved away from the Parkland area, they still have communal ties to their South Florida hometown and high school. For instance, Alison, an attorney and an MSD graduate of 2013, grew up in Coral Springs and Parkland. She expressed that the Parkland community and those a part of it all have "a bond [like a] family that you don't have to explain [anything to]" since there is just this connection to home, and they understand where you come from. Alison talked about how she and other MSD alumni in the DC area because of their shared "bond," opened their homes so that victims' families had a place to stay when they attended the March For Our Lives in 2018. They found organizations to cater for this event and ensured that emotional and mental health professionals were at the march for support. Even though these MSD alumni in the DMV were around a thousand miles away, the sense and support of the community for Parkland, Coral Springs, and MSD still mattered to them. MSD alumni felt like an extension of their hometown in DC and were willing to come together to help, regardless of their situation or experiences in high school or Parkland/Coral Springs, which continues today.

One woman, Tammy, an attorney who graduated from MSD in 2015, explained that regardless of living in the DC area, she "still definitely feels connected to South Florida" and where she grew up. In most of the following responses to the question of whether they still feel like an extension of the Parkland, Coral Springs, and MSD communities, the interviewees acknowledged this continual attachment to the area:

Karen (Female graduate 2011): "I identify myself more as a Floridian, than I do as a Virginian [, like 100%]. I like where we live in Virginia. I can't believe it'll be ten years next year [since we moved here]. And we'll probably be living here for the foreseeable future. But I still feel like my identity is, like, it's not like 'Hi. I'm [so and so] and I live in Falls Church.' It's usually [more] like 'Hi, I was born and raised in Florida.' That's where I spent the majority of my life. And like, that's where I have the connection."

Although the majority of interviewees felt connected to the Parkland area today, some did not share the same perspective on the community. Some participants wanted to detach their identity and sense of self from their time at MSD, especially if they had negative, difficult experiences while living in the South Florida area. Sarah explained how she had "a lot of bitterness towards" the high school after she graduated "because it was a really tough environment" to be in with the rigorous and stressful academic environment of MSD. Regardless, the Parkland area is home to most of them, even Sarah. Their identity and sense of self will always be connected to the South Florida area, and it can never be erased for them, regardless of the tragedy at MSD, if anything it made them closer to their hometowns.

Finally, throughout the interviews, it became evident that outside of their Parkland/Coral Springs towns and MSD High School, the participants have been able to find their sense of community in the DMV following the tragedy. They have been able to move on from being children in their hometowns to adults in the DC area, creating their own identity, friends, and communities, outside of South Florida. From the Latin dance community in the DC area, for Nancy, a female 2015 graduate, to work and exercise classes for Emily, a female 1993 graduate, they have found their social community and place in the nation's capital. However, it is not to say that it has not been difficult at times for them to find a sense of community, as shown in female 2010 graduate Wendy's response:

"I think I have, but again COVID kind of shifted things [where people were] moving out of the city very quickly…So I think that for me, I keep finding a sense of community, but it's always changing just because DC [is] such a transient area…A lot of it was like at work. So, people that I worked with, I did try all of those [like Volo sports]. I joined a group called…oh my god, like the Bumble BFF group first for different things like just trying new things, figuring out what, you know, if I like, new hobbies or not, and then the people that also enjoy those things."

Even though the DMV is ever-changing with its "transient nature" (i.e., mentioned by Wendy, Lacey, and Amy), they all still have found a sense of self and belonging. As Emily expressed, she has been able to create "super tight connections with a lot of people" in the Washington DC area. The tragedy at MSD and the shared stigma they may face due to being from Parkland when introducing themselves to new potential friends or colleagues did not stop them from finding themselves and a sense of belonging in the DMV area. Though their social identity may have been influenced by the school shooting at MSD in the immediate aftermath with the buzz around Parkland, they still have discovered a community identity in either DC, Maryland, or Virginia.

Conclusion

From the interviews conducted in February to May 2024 on MSD alumni in the DC area, I found three main findings: the stigmatization based on their introductions before vs. after the tragedy, "weird feelings" as alumni from a high school that experienced a school shooting, and being an extension of the Parkland, Coral Springs, and MSD communities while discovering a sense of community in the DC area. As a case study, this is one of the first to understand how alumni from a high school and community that experienced a school shooting find their identity and community outside of it. MSD alumni have established their communal ties apart from their hometowns in South Florida, emphasizing the theoretical frameworks of Goffman, Du Bois, Burgess, and Shaw & McKay. However, in the study, one limitation is that participants attended MSD after 2016. There are no firsthand accounts from former MSD students who may have been present during the shooting or who graduated after it. It would have been interesting to see how they felt about possible stigmatization of their identities as being from the Parkland community and MSD alumni and if they found their communities in the DMV.

A continuation of my work in the future could include a study focusing on the MSD alumni who were at the high school at the time of the tragedy and who live in the DC area. It would allow for an understanding of the perspectives of how survivors and those who attended MSD view their identities post-shooting. Additionally, there should be studies that examine secondary communities impacted by gun violence at their schools, where their alumni are now, and if there is a group of them in the DMV. For instance, there can be an exploration of alumni and previous community members from Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, and Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown,

Connecticut.[15] These potential research studies will allow for a better understanding of those who have come from a community where a mass shooting has occurred. Furthermore, they would support my findings on how collective identity and "second consciousness" shape social interactions. In terms of stigmatized identity, additional studies can show the emphasis on the social relationships between individuals not affected and those influenced by school shootings due to the School Shooting Concentric Zone Model.

Additionally, it provides a snapshot into the lives of alumni and community members whose school tragedy has not stopped them from succeeding in life to the rest of American society. If a school shooting happens to one of their communities, there is a future afterward. Following the MSD High School shooting, David Hogg, a survivor of the tragedy, expressed how important it is for "our voices [to continue] on" for the victims, survivors, and communities impacted by gun violence (Bharadwaj et al., 2018). To conclude and "echo" this message of a future after a school shooting, we must listen to the message behind the lyrics of "SHINE," a tribute to the Parkland victims, survivors, and community's experience, written by MSD school shooting survivors, Sawyer Garrity and Andrea Peña:

> "You, you threw my city away
> You tore down the walls and opened up all the gates
> You, you ruined this town
> You burned all of the bridges, and you slowly let us drown…
>
> …We can hug a little tighter
> We can love a little more
> Laugh a little harder
> We can stand up and roar

[15] If we wanted to interview Robb Elementary School alumni who were at the school during the tragedy, we would have to wait until they were eighteen years or older. Anyone who is a graduate or attended Robb Elementary School before the shooting who is over eighteen, or from Uvalde, Texas, could be interviewed without any ethical restrictions.

If we all come together, it will be all right
Stand up for one another, and we'll never give up the fight…

….[But] you're not gonna knock us down
We'll get back up again
You may have hurt us
But I promise we'll be stronger and
We're not gonna let you win
We're putting up a fight
You may have brought the dark
But together we will shine the light
And whoah, we will be something special
Whoah, we're gonna shine"

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Appendices

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to take part in this research study being conducted by Jillian Medina, a graduate student in the Sociology Department at George Washington University who is working towards earning her master's in Criminology. It is under the supervision of Dr. Michelle Kelso and Dr. Daina Eglitis of the Department of Sociology at George Washington University (GWU). You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an alumnus of Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School who lives in the Washington DC area.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to understand the impact of the 2018 Parkland High School tragedy on former alumnus and how their life and career paths are being shaped. Our research questions are: How has the tragedy affected the self-identification of Parklanders? How have their lives been influenced by gun violence? How do Parklanders who have left the area seek out community with other Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School alumni?

AM I THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THIS RESEARCH?

We want to converse with people who are now located in the District of Columbia and its surrounding areas in the DMV who attended and graduated from Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School.

PARTICIPATION, PROCEDURES, AND TIME COMMITMENT

The researcher and participant will discuss the life and career paths of Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School alumnus, including their sense of self and community involvement.

Participation is voluntary and you can quit at any time without a reason and any detrimental consequences. The interview will be conducted in person, on the phone, or via the GWU Zoom platform. The interview will last between 30-45 minutes and will be recorded with your permission.

BENEFITS, RISKS, AND PRIVACIES

This is a low-risk study. If you have well-being concerns during the interview or do not want to participate at any point, you may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Compensation will not be provided for participation in this interview. One possible risk may be loss of confidentiality. We will minimize those risks by anonymizing your identity in our materials.

QUESTIONS

Talk to the research team if you have questions, concerns, complaints, or think you have been harmed. Further information regarding this study may be obtained by contacting the Graduate Student Researcher, Jillian Medina, and the Principal Investigators listed below. For questions regarding your rights as a participant in human research call the GWU Office of Human Research at 202-994-2715.

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DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

The "Weird Feeling" of School Shooting Alumni:

MSD Alum's Collective Identity and Community Consciousness in the DC Area

We are trying to understand the impact of the 2018 Parkland High School tragedy on former alumnus and how their lives and career paths are being shaped today. It is important to let you know that there may be a loss of confidentiality, but we will minimize it by using anonymity through pseudonyms or respondent numbers to protect your identity. At any point, you can withdraw from the study without any consequences or penalties.

By verbally agreeing that this information about the study has been explained and you have had the opportunity to ask questions, you agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records as well.

Did you read the document I sent you? Do you VERBALLY CONSENT to participating in the study?

Introduction to the Interview:

My name is Jillian Medina, and I am a graduate student in the criminology program at George Washington University. This study is about the lives of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSD) alumnus who live in the Washington DC area. Specifically, I am interested in learning about your lives and the communities you belong to today.

I have some prepared questions about your experiences and I hope our conversation will generate more dialogue between us. I am sure you will have some things you want to talk about as well. Our discussion will be recorded [GWU Zoom platform or on my iPhone] so that I can concentrate fully on our conversation. If you want me to stop the recording for any reason or at any time, please let me know. No one will hear the recording except for me when I transcribe it.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Is it okay to turn on the recording function on my phone now?

The recording has started now. Now, let us begin!

Interview Questionnaire

1. Tell me about your connection to the Parkland area.
    i. **If they lived there, ask this:**
        1. How long did you live in Parkland?
    ii. **If they went to school there, ask this:**
        1. What schools did you attend in the area?
    iii. **If they worked there, ask this:**
        1. What was your occupation? How long did you work in the community/communities?
2. How long ago did you leave Parkland and why?
    i. Probe: Work? School? Other reasons (family moved)?
3. Are you still connected to the Parkland area in any way?
    i. Probe: Friends? Family? Community?

Now, I would like to turn our conversation to the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School. Many people in our community and the United States were affected by the events in Parkland. As you know several youth, teachers, and parents have become advocates for gun control. Others have pursued political and social change for significant reforms around areas, such as school safety reforms and mental health practices. Still, others may prefer not to engage with or talk about this tragedy due to personal reasons.

4. How has (or if at all) the Parkland tragedy affected your work, education, or life path?
5. Now, I would like for us to talk about your residency in the DMV area.

i. What brought you to DC?

ii. How long have you lived/worked here?

iii. College? Job opportunity?

6. After arriving in the DC area, how have you found a sense of community?

    i. Can you share with me some of the communities you belong to?

    ii. Probe: Did you seek out people who used to live in Parkland or attended Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and/or attended Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School?

    iii. If yes, what were your reasons for wanting to connect with Parklanders?

        1. Probe: How do you interact with Parklanders?

        2. Probe: How often? How do you feel about that?

    iv. If not, are you interested in finding a Parkland community in the DC area?

Sometimes it is difficult for people to talk about tragedies that have happened in their community. Some may choose not to share about their town to avoid explanations, judgements, or stigmatizations.

7. In light of the MSD tragedy, how do you introduce yourself and your background to others?

    i. When a new acquaintance or colleague asks where you are from, what do you tell them?

    ii. Do you share that you lived/attended school in Parkland?

    iii. If you mention your connection to Parkland, how do people respond?

1. Is there a difference in how you describe or talk about your relationship to Parkland before the school shooting experience to today?

8. Do you feel like you are a part of an extended Parkland community? Why or why not?
9. What kind of conversations have you had with individuals outside of Parkland about your time in Parkland in relation to the tragedy?
10. What does the Parkland community mean to you?
    i. And to others you have spoken with?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share with me today about Parkland and the Parkland/DMV community?

Thank them for their time, and let them know you will be in touch.

Participant Profile Summary

1. **Hailey**: a female who graduated in 2013; advertiser
2. **Tammy**: a female who graduated in 2015; attorney
3. **Nancy**: a female who graduated in 2015; dance teacher
4. **Jake**: a male who graduated in 2015; legislative assistant
5. **Alison**: a female who graduated in 2013; attorney
6. **Derek**: a male who graduated in 2013; environmental attorney
7. **Diane**: a female who graduated in 2002; podiatrist
8. **Karen**: a female who graduated in 2011; consulting firm
9. **Lacey**: a female who attended Stoneman Douglas from 1996-1998 and graduated from Coral Springs High School in 2000; pediatric nurse practitioner
10. **Asher**: a male who graduated in 2016; March For Our Lives
11. **Emily**: a female who graduated in 1993; science policy
12. **Wendy**: a female who graduated in 2010; implementation specialist in schools
13. **Diane**: a female who graduated in 2015; Giffords
14. **Sadie**: a female who graduated in 2000; part-time consulting and used to be a prosecutor
15. **Sarah**: a female who graduated in 2014; telecommunications regulatory lawyer
16. **Lance**: a male who attended Douglas in 2004 and graduated from Glades High School in 2006; used to be in the military
17. **Amy**: a female who attended MSD in 2008-2010 and graduated from the College Academy in 2012; lawyer