


**Parallel Days
during
COVID-19:
Different
Impacts**



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ANT240 Medical Anthropology

Acknowledgements

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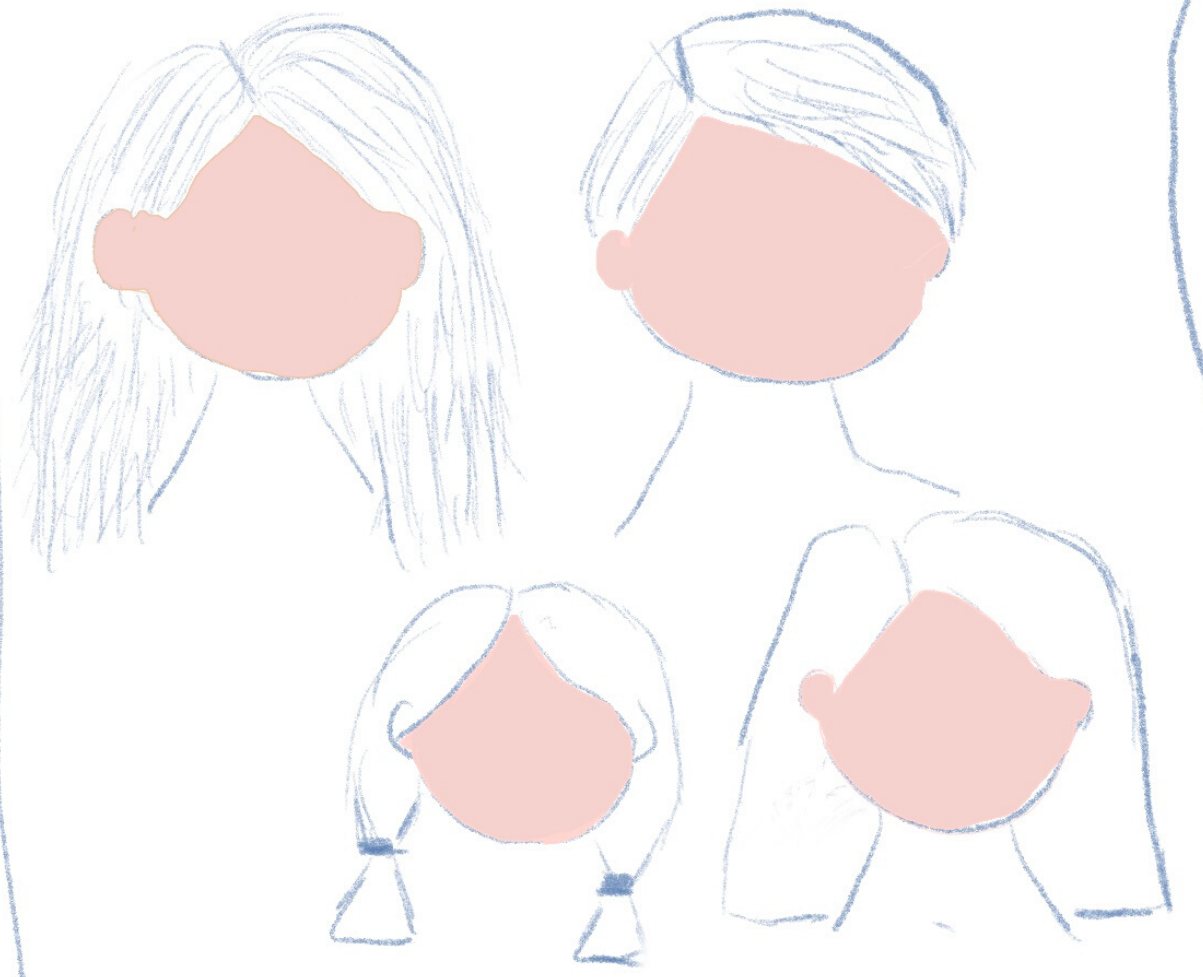
This is the story of two best friends experiencing Covid-19.

This is Jasmine.

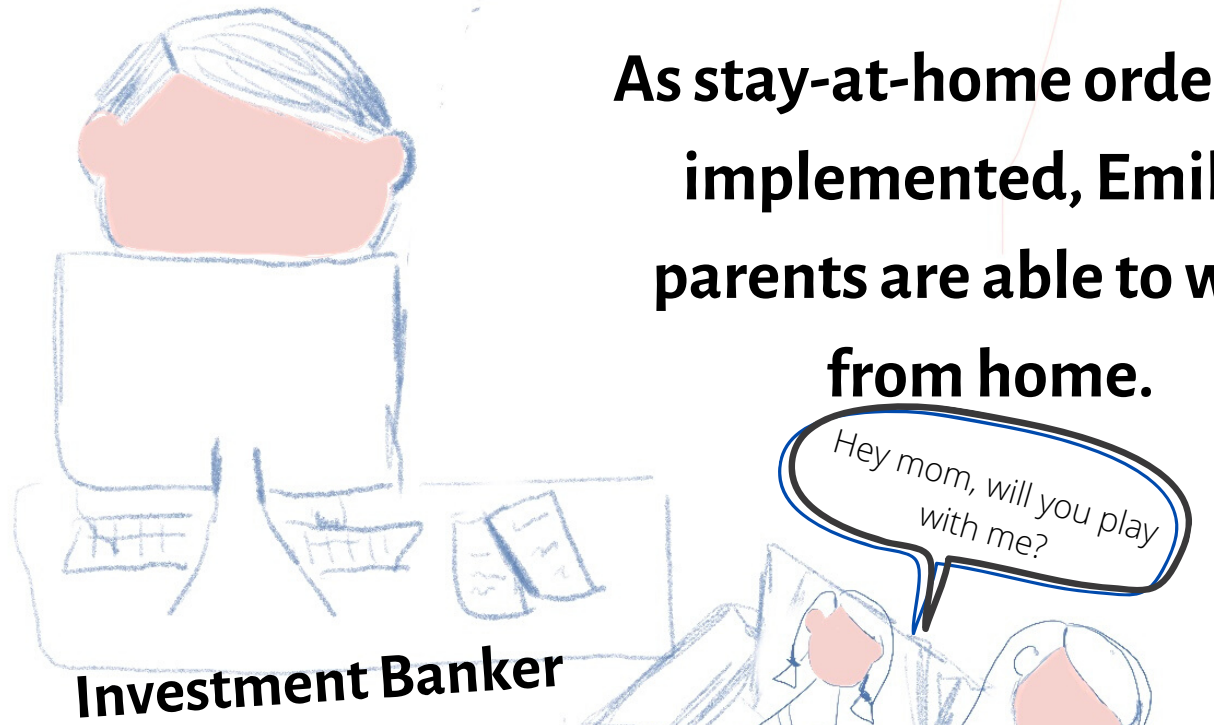
This is Emily.



Emily's family consists of her mom, Julie, her dad, Daniel, and older sister Sarah.



As stay-at-home orders are implemented, Emily's parents are able to work from home.



Jasmine lives with her mom, Tiffany, her dad, Nick, and older sister, Destiny.



Not right now, okay? I'm working.



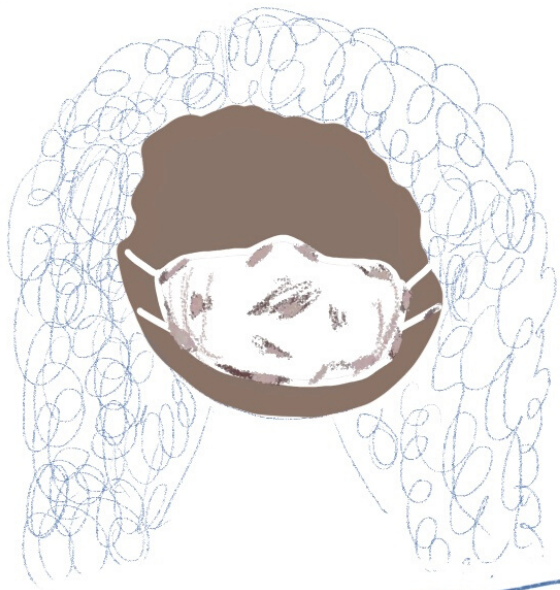
However, Jasmine's family cannot work from home.

As Covid-19 continues to affect the United States, many families and friends, such as Jasmine and Emily, were forced to separate, changing their lives as they know it. It is interesting to see how it will affect these (almost) identical nuclear families. While on the surface, it may seem as though this pandemic is equally impacting every community, Covid-19 is only exacerbating the pre-existing structural violences that low-income, communities of color have been facing.

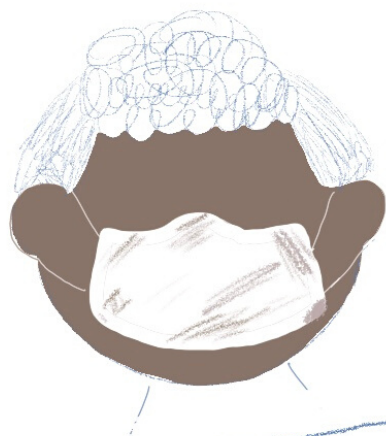
Paul Farmer, a medical anthropologist, defined structural violence as the result of inequitable political, social, economic system that continues to hinder individuals access to basic needs and living a sufficient and quality life. In a general sense, Americans like Emily's family are able to safely exist in the Corona world due to societal status and privilege.

On the other hand, families like Jasmine's must "endanger" themselves everyday because the US systems do not allow them to fully participate in governmental orders.

Emily's family represents the affluent community benefited by the US systems during this pandemic. Emily's parents, Daniel and Julie, are able to continue their well-paid jobs at home. This allows them to be financially stable throughout the pandemic, which is a polar opposite experience of Jasmine's family. This leads us to ask how income and financial status play into the treatment of the pandemic. Also, we wonder, how does the pandemic affect family dynamics? Does the health of a family depend on society? And finally, with the US government focused on alleviating the damaged economy while simultaneously trying to protect "all" Americans, where does the US fail to account the damages on vulnerable families?



This is Tiffany. She has been working 8 hour shifts with the same mask for 3 days.



This is Nick, who has worked 8 hour shifts with the same mask.

I miss Mommy and Daddy.

Me too.



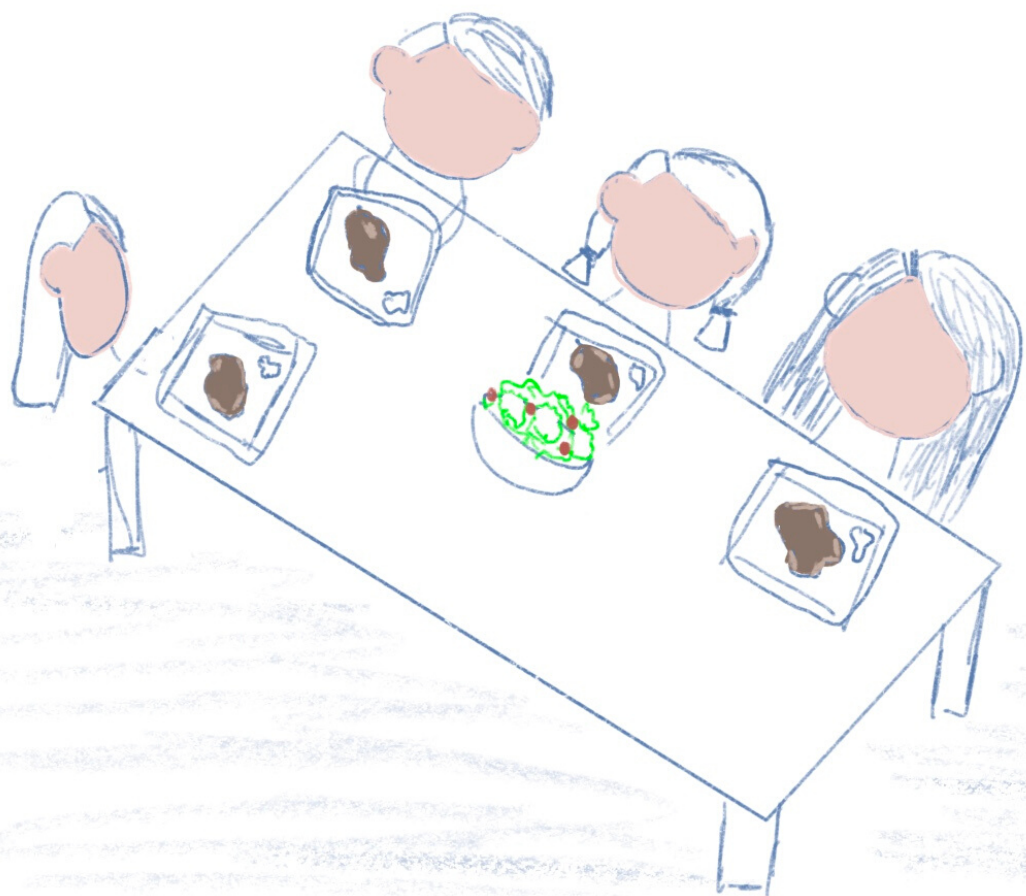
While their parents are at work, Jasmine and Destiny spend their day doing homework, cleaning, and taking care of each other.

At dinner time...

Laughter and light hearted stories can be heard at the dinner table, despite eating fast food.



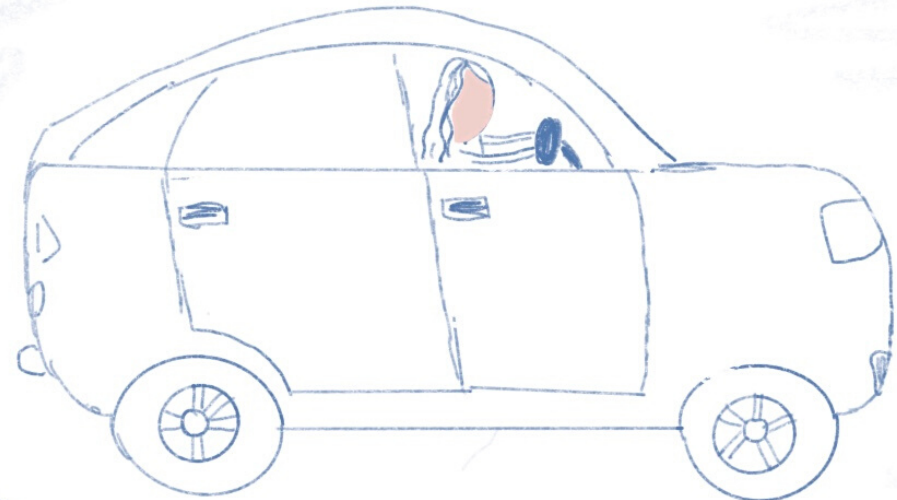
crickets chirping



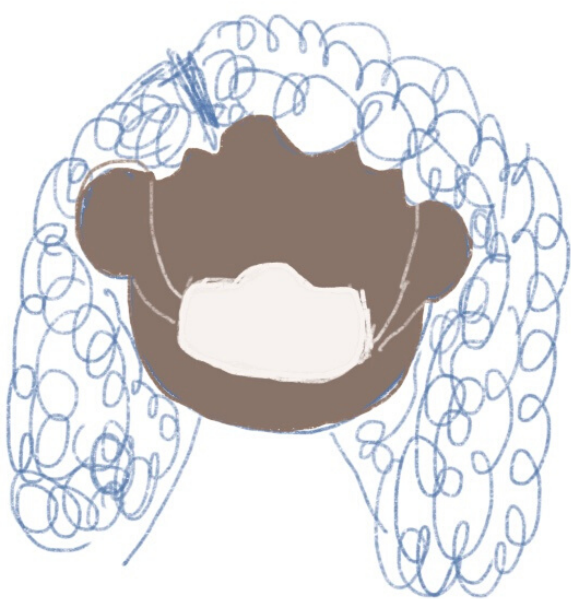
At Emily's family dinner, they are enjoying a freshly-cooked and healthy meal. There is little conversation.

Latoya Ruby, author of "The Notion of Family," intricately captures the closely related political, social, and economic powers that impact the daily lives of Braddock, Pennsylvania. Specifically, her ability to show the imitate but exhaustion role of care-taking for multiple family members can be reconnected back to the parallel lives of Emily's and Jasmine's family. While Emily's family is working from home, Emily and Sarah can play with each other and not be burdened by the potential health risk of their parents. In comparison, Jasmine and Destiny are home alone, left to cook, clean, and watch after themselves. This is an immense burden for a young child and teenager to take on, in addition to worrying about the safety of their parents. Another idea that can be found in this story as well as Frazier's is the growing closeness of family under non-ideal circumstances. Jasmine's family enjoys their time together and appreciate one another because they do not have anything else to really care for; they don't have a lot of money nor assets, so they are able to focus their attention on familial bonding. It is like their low status enhances their appreciation of each other. This is not seen in Emily's family where there are many things to keep them busy. At one point Emily asks her mom to play with her, but her mother cares more about her work.

After a long, exhausting shift full of social interaction, Tiffany brought food from her job to her family in hopes of not bringing the virus, too. She wonders whether the mask is really protecting her.



Tiffany's economic disadvantages pushes her to work in risky social interaction, in comparison to Julie, who safely social distances and maintains a stable income.



Tiffany wants the pandemic to end so she can spend time with family.
Julie wants it to end so she can go back to the office.

Although the company offers a little bonus during this time, Nick spends his work days hoping for better compensation for the amount of time he contributes to his grocery job and the danger he seems to face everyday. All he wants to do is pay his bills and provide for his family.



Nick feels a little swelling in his legs from last night's salty dinner, but he keeps working. He can't stop or he loses money.

While Daniel is comfortably working from home, Nick has to face the harsh reality of the health and financial disparities.



Extending on the impactful work by Farmer, it is vital to acknowledge the US government's long history of creating and perpetuating the marginalized communities through policies that often overlook the realities of low-income communities of color. For example, the social distancing mandate is often not possible for essential workers and low-income citizens. This is due to the areas in which they live and work. Their situations are not actually a result of their personal choices, but of the governmental and socioeconomic systems in place. The marginalized communities don't form themselves nor do they continue the cycle alone; the narrow inequity policies and socioeconomic biases created by the larger system make up what is the "marginalized community" and continue to feed a glass ceiling towards them. For example, many essential jobs are low-paying, such as Tiffany's and Nick's jobs, and are fulfilled by individuals of color and/or low socioeconomic status. Some employers will prey on income vulnerability and offer bonuses (but still not sufficient pay) for these individuals to continue to work, while not having the proper protective gear. Nick demonstrates the ultimatum that many Americans are facing: whether to work for an extra few dollars to put food on the table or falling further into economic instability, yet keeping the family healthy and unexposed.

As Jasmine's family worries about contracting the virus, it is important to note that those in their demographic are not only more likely to get it, but to suffer worse consequences from it. COVID-19 is worse for people with pre-existing health conditions and it is known that individuals with lower incomes, especially African Americans and Hispanics, have higher rates of conditions like hypertension and high cholesterol. Classism in the economy has aided in the unequal distribution of these conditions. There are more fast food places in low-income, minority communities because businesses believe minority neighborhoods need affordable food. This happens to be true since where there is fresh food, it is more than likely too expensive to be bought by the people of the community. So, the physical health of that community is impacted negatively by economic trends. This is evidence that the economy and capitalism feeds into cyclic discrimination, adversely affecting the physical health of poor citizens. In times of a pandemic, these effects are only magnified.

Recently as many states continues their stay-at-home orders, there have been people protesting, demanding businesses to be reopen (e.g., nail salons, barber and hair salons). This troublesome nature can be further linked back to our country's values of freedom and individuality. This is an issue because despite the number of COVID-19 cases rising everyday, there's a sense of entitlement that people should make their own choices and it'll be their own fault for potentially contracting the virus.

However, this is a naive perspective about the glaringly harmful and deadly virus. The choices that one individual makes affects not only the friends and family of the individual, but also puts random people in danger. The health of individuals is only as good as the health of the overall population. This is why understanding the gaps and differences between everyone's experiences is really important. You cannot strive for a healthier community without an understanding of an individual's current status and inequality. From our short illustration, we hope to further debunk the misconception that Covid-19 is a health equalizer. The story of Jasmine and Emily is the reality for thousands of Americans.

Citations

Biehl, João. 2020. "Lecture: Structural Violence and Resocializing Medicine."

Farmer, Paul. 2003. "On Suffering and Structural Violence." Pathologies of Power. Berkeley: UC Press, pp. 29-50.

Frazier, LaToya Ruby. 2014. *The Notion of Family*. New York: Aperture