
Theses, Dissertations, and Projects

2016

Toxic stress : exploring mental health narratives of environmental justice in Richmond, California

Elizabeth Gonzalez
Smith College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gonzalez, Elizabeth, "Toxic stress : exploring mental health narratives of environmental justice in Richmond, California" (2016). Masters Thesis, Smith College, Northampton, MA.
<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/1771>

This Masters Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, and Projects by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@smith.edu.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory study was to gather narratives of residents and/or community members who perceive the presence of the Richmond Chevron Oil Refinery in their community as a psychological stressor. The study used semi-structured interviews with eight community organizers and activists to gather qualitative data providing personal accounts of the possible psychological impact of living near a toxic facility with great political power in the city. The common trend among the narratives was the tendency of the participants to focus on a macro interpretation of how mental health is affected by a corporate giant. A collective sense of mental health was described using structural and institutional factors to explain why the city lived in a state of stress and poor health. The themes explaining the impact on mental health fell into five categories: 1) paternalism, 2) lack of accountability, 3) physical and mental health, and 4) racism from an intersectional perspective. This study contributes to the literature in that it centers experiential knowledge of communities impacted by environmental racism and elucidates the dynamics between residents and the refinery's corporate power. The historically troubled relationship between Chevron and Richmond continues to generate a lasting impact on the city's social, political, and economic spheres. This study also highlights the need for social work as a profession to consider the ways in which macro forces impact communities subjected to environmental racism or exploitation.

**TOXIC STRESS: EXPLORING MENTAL HEALTH NARRATIVES OF
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA**

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Elizabeth Gonzalez

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I have to thank my eight participants who provided so much wisdom and life to my thesis. You have made feel even more proud to be from Richmond knowing that the city and its people have the bravest of souls fighting for community empowerment.

To my family, thank you for the infinite tough love. To my parents, *los amo con todo mi corazón. Les debo mi vida. Esta tesis y mi título les pertenece, tambien.*

I owe great amount of gratitude to my thesis advisor, Andrew Jilani, for his patience and inspirational metaphors. It was an honor being your advisee and thank you for the encouragement when I had given up hope for this project. Thank you, always.

Thank you to my friends at Smith. I literally would not have been here without you. Josh, Kyla, Tatiana, Manuel, Freddy, Zoe, and Maki—you have my heart.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
III METHODOLOGY.....	20
IV FINDINGS.....	28
V DISCUSSION.....	45
REFERENCES.....	54
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Smith College Human Subjects Review Committee Approval Letters.....	61
Appendix B: Informed Consent Materials.....	62
Appendix C: Resource Pamphlet.....	65
Appendix D: Guiding Questions.....	67
Appendix E: Recruitment Email.....	68

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Participants	30
-----------------------	----

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a life-long resident of Richmond, CA., a small city situated in the San Francisco Bay Area, I wanted to explore an issue relevant to the city that has inspired me in many ways. An issue ever present for those of us who live in the city is the threat or fear that the Chevron Refinery could explode and severely affect the lives and health of residents in Richmond and surrounding areas. Growing up in Richmond, fires and minor explosions emanating from the refinery were familiar sights—they even seemed exciting to us as children watching the refinery’s flames and smoke from the school yard. I remember lining up along the fence with my peers watching as the smoke lingered above. As I became conscious of the severity of these explosions and, in general, the refinery’s daily toxic emissions, I began to interpret the refinery’s presence as a form of exploitation that sadly, had become characteristic of the city.

In 2012, a massive explosion solidified how poisonous the refinery had become in our city and highlighted how this toxic facility presented as a major social issue that seemed to thrive on the oppressive conditions. It is believed that fifteen thousand people were treated for a wide range of illnesses and injuries, which the validity of such figure and severity is questioned. Additionally, the city is known for having relatively high rates of autoimmune diseases. While scientists can argue for correlation and causation of these diseases with toxic emissions and chronic pollution as associated with the refinery, psychological stress is not as obviously documented. For this reason, among countless others, this researcher decided to collect stories directly from those affected and inquire if they perceive the refinery as a source of stress and if

so, how was their narrative constructed based on their involvement or residence in the community?

Following the explosion, in 2014 Chevron invested \$3 million dollars into the local election of this rather small city (Knox & Wear,, 2014, Pp. 18). The election gained national attention since it was reportedly one of the most costly city elections, which begs the question, why would a corporate giant invest millions into a city of about 100,000 people?

This researcher strongly leans towards considering the refinery an entity that perpetuates intersectional oppression, such as racism and classism, and I have grown to resent the tension it creates in the city, which will be discussed more in-depth in later portions of this study. I am also aware of the ways in which I have benefitted from the refinery's contributions to the city—including receiving monetary compensation for an explosion in the early '90s and as a recipient of a scholarship partially funded by Chevron when I graduated from high school. Feeling conflicted and guilty seemed unproductive and implied complicity in what has become a cycle of oppression in Richmond; therefore, I wanted to actively partake in a project that sought to explore the complexities the refinery's presence influenced the participants' perceptions as it being a stressor. From my perspective, I view the refinery's presence as highly paternalistic since the city is considered a city plagued by many social issues; therefore, Chevron and its millions are thought to benefit the city with limited revenue.

As I grew racially conscious and more aware of environmental justice issues, I also felt like the relationship not only thrived off of an intersection between race and class. The city's demographics present statistics indicating a high percentage of people of color/non-white

individuals (City of Richmond, 2015), which seemed to match the documented trend of the proximity of toxic facilities to poor and communities of color (Taylor, D.E., 2014. Pp.1).

This study aims to explore how the presence of the Chevron Oil Refinery in Richmond, CA. influences residents' perceptions of the refinery as a source of psychological stress. This study's focus and exploration of possible negative psychological effects, whether that be stress, anxiety, anger, etc., on those who perceive the refinery's presence as problematic, helped provide a more personal understanding of the state of the community health of Richmond. Using the narratives of community members, I gained exposure to stories that are often not publicly known. From my own lived experience as a life-long resident of Richmond, the city has a very negative reputation and its citizens are viewed in a similar perspective. Collecting narratives was not only important to understand the varying interpretations of Chevron as a possible psychological stressor, but it is also a challenge to the dominant, problematic narrative assigned to the city by those unfamiliar with the complex city.

In addition, the goal was to provide a space for a historically disenfranchised community to voice their narratives and contribute to growing literature on environmental justice. Ideally, this study would contribute to anti-racism work by centering the experiences and narratives of historically oppressed peoples and community members. Through personal accounts discussing Chevron as a stressor, social work as a field can address how the impact of environmental justice affects the psychological state of a community at the micro and macro levels.

Given the documented acknowledgment of the absence of literature examining mental health effects of place-based hazards, such as toxic facilities, on poor communities and communities of color (Arrigo, 2015, Martin & Do 2014), presenting the voices of those affected

and those willing to vocalize their experience can push against the dominant narrative or interpretation of the refinery's presence, as well as the misperceptions of those living in Richmond. As a result of snowball sampling, many of the participants happen to be involved in various social justice movements within the city. Activism seemed to be a trend among participants, however, interestingly enough, provided a range of perspectives. Through intensive interviewing, I explored how the presence of the oil refinery has shaped the mental health narratives or perceptions of the city's residents who consider the refinery a problematic influence or stressor of the city.

Additionally, the controversy in Flint, Michigan, which made public the foul condition of their water source, elucidates why it is absolutely essential to consider how racialized communities are perpetually neglected and traumatized by life-threatening environmental conditions. While the physical and physiological effects of place-based hazards often become the focus of health-related issues, the manner in which these issues psychologically impact a community is not always the focus. As mental health professionals, it seems imperative to consider a person-in-environment approach that intentionally considers the physical surroundings, such as place-based hazards, affects the person as a whole by allowing them to shape their narrative. As previously stated, pollution may be linked to physical and physiological health issues, however the complex and intersectional psychological effects of stressors like Chevron may be easily overlooked since mental health is not as easily discussed.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This chapter will present relevant, existing literature providing context for possible psychological impact on specific communities living near toxic facilities and will also explore the saliency of narratives of those affected. Additionally, this chapter will provide context of the history and current state of Richmond, California paired with the inclusion of a description of the relationship with the Chevron Oil Refinery.

Since 1902 Richmond, California, a small city of approximately 103,701 people in the San Francisco Bay Area (City of Richmond, 2015) has been caught in a compromised relationship with the Chevron Oil Refinery. Since the early development of the city, Chevron has established itself as a major political and economic influence (Chevron Richmond, 2015). Chevron is proclaimed to be the top employer in Richmond—employing roughly 2,191 people (City of Richmond, 2015). The refinery has contributed millions of dollars to the local school district by funding projects, supporting the sciences, providing scholarships for students, and grants for teachers (Chevron Richmond, 2015). While the refinery publicizes its community involvement and support, its presence is linked to a vast amount of toxic pollution and subsequent community health issues. Although there are community efforts to push for regulation of pollution, as well as attempting to require that the refinery assume more community responsibility in terms of taxes, Chevron has historically exercised major political influence in the city, which has shaped the city's environment and climate both literally and figuratively.

Through exploratory interviews, many complexities of Chevron's presence will be highlighted in this study with a strong emphasis on how it is interpreted as a psychological

stressor by residents and those active in the anti-Chevron effort. Given how strongly this community with multiple social stressors is affected by Chevron's presence and how limited personal accounts are made public, centering the narratives of those directly affected would add to the literature of multiple fields. The study will explore if those who live in the Richmond community perceive Chevron as a psychological stressor. And, if so, why or how?

The majority of Richmond's residents are people of color (Juhasz, 2009. p. 16) and many live in close proximity to the refinery. According to demographic statistics released by the City of Richmond's Planning and Building Services Department, only 17.1% of the city's population identify as "White not Hispanic or Latino," therefore indicating an overwhelming majority are people of color (City of Richmond, 2015). The refinery is located near the unincorporated neighborhood of North Richmond, whose population is 97% Black, Latino, and Asian (Environmental Health News, 2012). The Silent Spring Institute study suggests that toxic pollutants contribute greatly to the poor health conditions of Richmond's residents (Green Brody et. al, 2009). Due to being a historically and presently exploited, "vulnerable" population, existing testimonies and studies suggest disproportional health defects. Given the political power of Chevron in the city of Richmond, it is possible that those negatively affected by toxins emitted by the refinery may not have the resources or privileges to address their health needs largely caused by this environmental issue.

Throughout Richmond's history, Chevron has been responsible for multiple explosions and the emission of dangerous toxic chemicals (Green Brody et. al, 2009). According to a study conducted by the Silent Spring Institute published in the American Journal of Public Health, exposure to the combination of toxins emitted by these types of refineries are hypothesized to cause "premature puberty, asthma, obesity, and cognitive development that disproportionately

affect low-income, minority populations” (Green Brody et. al, 2009). While physical health effects are more salient indicators of the refinery’s harmful presence, it is essential to explore how people interpret the presence of Chevron in the community and if they perceive the refinery as a stressor. In turn, the focus on mental health effects will provide a more in-depth understanding of the state of community health in Richmond. Additionally, it will provide perspective of how the refinery contributes to the marginalized community whether that is positive or negative.

Former Mayor and current City Council Member, Gayle McLaughlin, reported that “Time and time again...the Richmond City Council has heard testimony from residents about the impact of refinery emissions on their lives: burning eyes, shortness of breath, foul smells, residues on cars and windows” (Juhasz, A., 2009. p.16). In 2010, the State Court of Appeals upheld the decision that Chevron violated state environmental laws (Juhasz, A., 2010. p. 1). When Henry Clark, a lifelong resident of Richmond and Executive Director of the West County Toxics Coalition, was asked by Environmental Health News (2012) about his experience living relatively close to Chevron and being continuously exposed to emissions of chemicals, he stated that "energy and heat waves...would rock our house like we were caught in an earthquake...nobody came to check on the health of North Richmond." The article succinctly characterizes the situation in Richmond as “...the triple whammy of race, poverty and environment converging nationwide to create communities near pollution sources where nobody else wants to live” (para. 12). Through the use of Clark’s personal narrative, the abstract or objective details of the environmental justice issues were personified. As helpful as narratives are in understanding societal issues, it would be further helpful if the type of methods utilized in this

article to depict Richmond's reality were explored through qualitative research with empirical data.

As previously stated, the Richmond Chevron refinery has been around for over a century and has exercised great political influence over the city. Throughout the years, Chevron has financially backed specific city council candidates that seemed to vote in favor of the refinery's interests. Most recently, Chevron famously attempted to buy the 2014 election (Knox & Wear, 2014) strong grassroots movement managed to defeat Chevron-backed candidates and gained seats for the city's progressive political players (Knox & Wear, 2014). In reference to the 2014 election, Knox and Wear contended that "Eventually, everyone was forced to view the elections through a lens of pro or anti-Chevron" (p.19). According to *Price of Oil*, a documentary created by the Health Equity Institute (Scobel et. al 2013), Chevron is the largest refinery in Northern California, therefore providing reasoning as to why it is of major importance to the corporation and to the city. Although the refinery contributed a record-breaking total of three million dollars to the campaigns of various Chevron-friendly candidates through the *Moving Forward* super Political Action Committee (PAC), the strong grassroots effort of the Richmond Progressive Alliance managed to defeat all Chevron-backed candidates (Knox & Wear, 2014, p.18). Knox and Wear best articulate the progressive paradigm operating in Richmond,

The difference between our visions of the democratic process in Richmond is this: progressives want residents to have a positive vision and body of representatives to enthusiastically support, while Chevron wants paternalistic and traditional leadership that will easily conform to their agenda (Knox & Wear, 2014, p. 19).

By understanding and interrogating Chevron's actual and potential political influence over the city, the aforementioned article provides a backdrop of the political and social climate of the city. In terms of social climate, the article also provided a brief description of the

demographics of the city and participation in political action. Richmond “ranks high in racial diversity” (p. 20). Therefore, a variety of perspectives and needs emanating from many communities could add greater complexity to the experience of living in a dynamic, often tension-filled city. Since World War II, Richmond has had a large Black population, which, according to Knox and Wear, has traditionally been loyal to the refinery given its industrial power and economic opportunities (p. 20). The progressives contended that building coalitions across racial groups through informed discourse was a factor in their victory over the Chevron-backed candidates (p. 20). Through grassroots efforts, personal contact, and egalitarian principles, the city’s people were able to defeat the corporate giant—a promising collective victory.

According to Corburn, Curl, and Arredondo (2014), people’s place of residence and how their residence is governed can determine health outcomes for residents. While the researchers admit that urban neighborhoods can be preferable places to live given the accessibility of a broad range of resources and services, they also acknowledge that some populations—namely minorities—experience more health inequities than others; therefore urban neighborhoods may also be locusts of unhealthy, exploitative exposure (p. 1905). Coincidentally, the study also centers Richmond, CA., as its placed-based hazards subject. The study explores the city’s “health-in-all-policies” approach to social inequities. This approach incorporates both governmental and community action to ensure that health equity is central to every decision made (p.1912). The researchers applaud the collaboration between the government, non-governmental agencies, and residents’ to push for transformative health outcomes that are always in the interest of Richmond’s residents and the environment.

Through narratives and political participation, residents were able to support the ongoing implementation of the “health-in-all” approach in the city. (Cobern, Curl, & Arredondo, 2015). The residents identified toxic environmental pollution in its many manifestations as a daily stressor, which is incredibly relevant to this study since the focus city is Richmond and the explicit identification of the aforementioned stressor indicates an explicit awareness of the environmental injustice present. The Richmond Health Equity Partnership subgroup emphasized the collective benefit of the health-in-all approach as a means to gain support from the public, which will allow for community participation in social justice work (p. 1909). The central positioning of community health prompted the revision of the health component of the city’s General Plan, which the researchers commend as an exemplary attempt at combatting health inequity (p. 1912). While public health is an obvious focus of the city’s governing body according to this study, mental health is not mentioned nor are any explicit testimonies included. Grievances are mentioned; however, how these stressors affect the psychological state of the community and its members is not addressed.

In 1987, the “Commission for Racial Justice found that race has been a factor in the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities” (Hamilton, 1995, p. 107), which is relevant to this study since the refinery resides in a city with a majority population of people of color. According to Miller and Garran (2008), “Environmental racism correlates with race and class. Poor people of color are more likely to live in neighborhoods...where they are subjected to...air pollution...and they are more likely to live near toxic chemical dump sites, in neighborhoods with elevated rates of cancers and other major diseases” (p. 73). Consistent with the aforementioned definition, it can be suggested that residents of Richmond are exposed to the insidious byproducts of environmental racism and injustice. The gravity of health concerns,

paired with societal stressors associated with living in a marginalized community (Green Brody et. al, 2009) calls for social attention since Chevron aims to expand its refinery, which would mean an increase in emissions of toxic chemicals from cruder, dirtier oil (Alexander, 2015).

Arrigo presents the concept of “Green Criminology,” which is defined as acts that produce harmful ecological consequences in less privileged communities (2015). If applied to the relationship between Richmond and Chevron, it could be argued that the proven ecological damage committed by the refinery is a perfect example of a “green crime” due to the impact of toxic emissions on the ecological surroundings. Arrigo critiques this framework by stating that it is missing an exploration of “...ways in which the forms of ecological harm and injustices associated with the green crimes of the powerful also produce psychological consequences that debilitate people” (2015, p. 227). According to Arrigo, green crimes in countries considered “advanced” are manifested through industrial pollution. In city such as Richmond, with strong industrial roots, pollution has been a chronic issue.

Consistent with many studies, Arrigo argues that toxic exposure is “unevenly distributed” and concentrated in low-income and minority neighborhoods (2015, p. 227-228). Poignantly stated in regards to ecological exploitation, “...considerably less attention has been paid to the experience of toxic exposure, especially including the mental health effects for people who reside in less-developed urban communities...” (p. 228). From a clinical psychology standpoint, these communities have been neglected and abandoned, therefore potentially affecting the “survivors” of green crimes (p. 228). The author calls for appropriate treatment and research that addresses the psychiatrists and psychological needs of those sorely affected by environmental injustice.

A study exploring the invisibility in the environmental movement argues that that “...pain and suffering push[es] ‘us’ up and against the limits of communication by revealing ‘our’ inability to share precisely what we feel when we are in pain or when we suffer” (Barnett, 2015, p. 406). While the statement presents a general claim that does not apply to many people, it highlights the trend of silence that is relevant to mental health issues, as it is a stigmatized subject in society. Just as toxins attacking physical health are invisible, so, too, are the many ways in which toxic areas may the psychological health of a community. If communicating health issues is a challenge in general, narratives of the psychological effects on a community may add to the invisibility. Silence around the psychological trauma of environmental racism, compounded with the severity of physical illnesses, presents a challenge for the implementation of services. The study suggests making visible the “physical and mental wounds” of communities through portraits in order to shed light on the catastrophic effects of neglect—for the purpose of this study; the “portraits” will be presented through personal accounts. Emphasizing the need for visibility and surveying the community could highlight the need for addressing the “mental wounds” and could prove helpful for addressing mental health need. In doing so, the narratives provide a paradigm that may grant justice for those affected—whether that be through political action through politics or through social activism (p .412).

In contrast to the argument that hazardous facilities are knowingly and purposely placed in communities of color, Mitchell, Thomas, and Cutter (1999) posit that claiming facilities make strategic decisions based on a location’s racial or economic make up is not necessarily an accurate explanation for environmental inequity. The researchers suggest that land costs and migration patterns might explain why toxic facilities happen to be located in communities where people with lower socioeconomic status and minorities reside (p. 241). Although some research

supports that the location for certain facilities is supposedly not a race-based decision (p. 239), the reality is that minorities are disproportionately affected, therefore creating an exploitative, unique experience that needs not be based on race based discrimination to highlight inequity. However, it should be noted that Chevron precedes the many waves of migration Richmond has experienced. Richmond “has faced a host of placed based hazards and stressors such as pollution, gun violence, and a dearth of economic opportunities” (Coburn, Curl, & Arredondo, 2014, p. 1905). Researchers of the aforementioned study contend that the factors listed contribute to poor health outcomes for Richmond residents.

In regards to the racial component of the environmental issue in Richmond, according to Sumie Okazaki (2009), it is understood and accepted that overt racism and racial prejudices produce harmful societal effects, however an underwhelming low number of research studies exploring and validating whether racism creates harmful *psychological* effects on individuals (p. 102-103)(my emphasis). Okazaki contends, “...we know relatively little about how being an actual or potential target of racially biased encounters affect racial minorities mental health” (p. 104). Okazaki cites various studies that suggest and support the claim that “...some racial minority individuals may sustain a lasting psychological injury from a traumatic racial victimization, which [results in] hyper vigilance and hypersensitivity...” (p.104). The study offers vital information supporting and calling for the need to address the mental health needs of people of color. Okazaki argues that racism negatively impacts the mental health of people of color, yet the issue is not explored in the scientific and social science fields. Although Okazaki mentions the various manifestations of racism in society, the study is limited to mostly explicit, interpersonal encounters with racism, as opposed to exploring the systemic manifestations’ of psychological effects in greater depth.

A study conducted to explore the effects of perceived racism among African-Americans revealed that using a bio psychosocial model could highlight how perceptions of those targeted impact psychological and physiological responses (assuming that racism is stressful) and what the consequent coping mechanisms is utilized in combatting the stress(ors). Chronic and acute stress is differentiated in order to understand or predict particular health outcomes (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999, p. 807). In addition to race, the study explores association between perceived racism and socioeconomic status (SES) among African Americans. According to the researchers, the fewer SES African Americans have, the more vulnerable they are to negative health outcomes (p. 807-808). The study's suggestions to consider a bio psychosocial model is incredibly useful in that it considers the individual or group's reaction to perceived racism as influenced by multiple factors within their environment. Particularly relevant, the researchers emphasize that

...psychological and physiological stress responses are more sensitive to an individual's perception of stressfulness than objective demands, there is not a priori way of determining if an environmental stimulus will be perceived as racist by an individual (p.807).

Also, the researchers suggest that because African Americans perceive higher levels of racism than White Americans, there could be an added "resource strain" since they are employing more coping mechanisms to maneuver racism-related stress, namely "...behavioral exhaustion and psychological and physiological distress" (p. 808). A common coping mechanism of ethnic minorities named in this study is "denial," which suggests that individual responses to racism maintain structures that perpetuate racism; therefore, racism may contribute to negative health effects. According to the researchers, existing studies support their claim that

non-African Americans “not only perceive racism, but that such perceptions also adversely affect their psychological well-being...” (p.813), which is helpful of the researchers to include given the changing demographics of various areas and the increased emphasis on environmental racism as a precipitant of negative health outcomes.

In addition to the explicit perceptions of racism as contributing factors in exacerbating negative health effects, the authors inclusion of the *felt* effects of institutional racism, such as “...reduced access goods, services, and opportunities for Africans American...” provides another paradigm to use in understanding the stress responses to racism, i.e. anger, paranoia, anxiety, helplessness-hopelessness, frustration, resentment and fear (p. 811-812) (my emphasis). While perceptions are incredibly relevant measures of felt racism, including an analysis of systemic racism (combination of structural and institutional racism) is an important reminder of the extent to which racism affects health and considers an intersectional approach.

According to a study examining the differences in perceptions of environmental risk across ethnicity and gender, the authors contend that “Lay people may not recognize some hazards at all which are considered significant by experts, or may have concerns that experts either have never formally assessed or believe to be low” (Laws et. al 2015, p. 948). As indicated by this observation, there may be lack of disconnect between what “lay people” perceive about their environment and what is publicly known or explored. The researchers support that people of color and people with lower SES are more likely to live near areas of pollution than their white counterparts (p. 952). The study found that “...maybe direct experience of perceived exposure to environmental risk is more important than cultural or psychological proclivities in explaining ethnic disparities in risk perception,” citing that perhaps perceptions of environmental risk may be informed by direct experience of hazards as opposed to other social factors (p. 952-

953). While this observation may be poignant in explaining concrete disparities in risk perception through quantitative data, the narratives of those affected as influenced by their social positioning as racialized people seems slightly under emphasized.

According to a study focused on the disproportionate effects of pollution of minorities in Los Angeles, 20% of people of color live within a one-mile radius of environmental toxic disposal (Martin & Do, 2014, p. 22). California is identified as a major area affected by pollution—mostly in urban areas and large metropolitan areas. Included in the study is the claim that “...current environment-legal paradigm trades the lives of minorities for profit” (p. 23). Asthma, lung disease, cancer and many more are among the many health implications believed to be associated with the exposure of toxins. The authors of the aforementioned study contend that “...in examining environmental racism it is important to consider the ‘structure of space, the historic stigmatization of blacks within the white political community, the resulting partitioned ethic, all need to be taken into account in understanding the distribution of pollution’” (p.23). Historic and present existence of unfair housing practices forced people of color to live in less desirable areas, including those with unhealthy living conditions. Low-income people of color and low-income whites are not able to simply move out of these communities: choice does not exist.

This same study contends that by virtue of having less social capital, communities of color are unable to partake in the decision-making process (Martin & Do, 2014). These communities may not be as well informed of their rights and opportunities for civic engagement when facing the threat of environmental racism. The study identified the beneficial act of interviewing an array of individuals to better understand how they perceive their agency in involvement with social justice issues. Additionally, since the lack of social capital has already

been identified as a major issue in access in these areas, it would be crucial to explore how and if these resources are utilized or known to exist. Collecting data would be very difficult without a space for affected individuals to vocalize their experiences.

Martin and Do (2014) present the notion that “...the lack of access to healthcare in impoverished areas coupled with chronic stress of poverty and increased environmental exposure to indoor pollutants, ‘create...’ a greater need for more investment in access to health care through the creation of local community health clinics...” (Martin & Do, 2014, p. 29), which would therefore center low-income, people of color when discussing mental health issues within circles of political influence. Lastly, the study offers an impactful claim stating that “...continued neglect of the health and wellbeing of these communities would only further enforce the cyclical effects of racism” (p. 30).

As defined by Newton, environmental justice (EJ) is the confluence of Environmentalism and Civil Rights (Newton, 2009, p. 18). Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act is considered the most viable opportunity for federal action against agencies or facilities receiving federal funding suspected of racial discrimination or exploitation (Taylor, 2014, p. 118). However, the suing party must prove *intentional discrimination* on behalf of the facility, as opposed to considering the sole impact of discrimination or inequity (p.18) (my emphasis). Permitting decisions, which set the limit of allowable pollution, are “potentially subject to the Title VI rules,” therefore, environmental justice advocates may take legal action against the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) if there are any complaints of environmental injustice or racism (p.118-120). According to Taylor (2014), very few complaints meet the strict evidentiary bar and, additionally, the EPA has been very ineffective in handling environmental racism cases—

citing great delays in processing petitions and poorly attending to the backlog of cases (p. 120-121).

In 1994 President Clinton signed Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice, which was intended to protect low-income and minority communities from negative environmental impacts enabled by federal agencies and their policies (Taylor, 2014, p. 121). However, some scholars argue that the compliance with Executive Order 12898 has been relatively weak since enforcement of Title VI is limited (p. 121). In reference to permits necessary to operate noxious facilities, such as Chevron, the EPA created the *permitting initiative* (as part of its Plan EJ 2014) (my emphasis), which aims to “...ensure that EJ concerns are considered fully in the permitting process under existing federal environmental laws” (p. 122).

Taylor (2014) contends that although the federal government has attempted to address EJ regulation, it has been extremely difficult for communities to convince judges that there were intentional discriminatory actions, which would then explain the disproportionate impact (p. 122). Taylor explains that “Mere evidence or proof that there is disparate or disproportionate impact on one or more groups of people in a EJ case is not sufficient enough to prove intent to discriminate...”(p. 106), which highlights the complexity of systemic (institutional and structural) obstacles that may actually perpetuate injustice in “overburdened” communities (p. 122).

Exploring environmental justice as it is addressed through the legal system, two separate studies identify ways in which environmental racism and its negative effects can be addressed. In a 1991 law review by The Michigan Law Association, Judge Richard Posner warns against

“fool[ing] ourselves into thinking that profound social problems are actually solvable...[however] the understanding and amelioration of such problems’ is possible” (p. 427). The review argues that it is necessary to ensure state and federal accountability when trying to create social change. In other words, one must become politically involved to influence policy changes. The review also acknowledges that it is difficult for minorities to prove that environmental discrimination is based on race. In 1993, the Texas Task Force, a grassroots activist group, was formed to address the contamination in various cities. Since the organization supported restoring agency in the community and encouraging political activists to push for equal rights, it emphasized making public the personal needs of communities who were denied a safe and clean environment (Diaz, 1993).

The grassroots movement has worked to address the harmful effects of environment racism in communities of color, which have become “dumping grounds for all kinds of deadly toxins and health threatening environmental problems” (Johnson et. al 2008, p. 204). In Dickson, Tennessee, a family filed a lawsuit in 2003 against the Dickson County upon discovering that their water wells had been contaminated with toxic waste (Johnson et. al 2008). Three generations of the family developed major health problems. The article, written in 2008, notes that the lawsuit was still pending. Whether or not the family won, their decision to resist further exploitation shed light on the need to address negligent environment contamination in communities of color. The study emphasizes the need to enact environmental justice through the use of the community itself; it is the voice and agency of those affected that can prompt change. While the article directly addresses the negative effects of environmental racism on the family’s physical health, the state of their mental health was not included in the study.

Grounded in various cases studies, Taylor (2014) acknowledges the argument that sometimes communities let toxic facilities *into* their communities. She contends that these communities are often “exceptions rather than the rule...” and thousands of communities experiencing environmental injustice did not have any agency in the decision (p. 145). In these cases, “Economic benefits are more influential in swaying poor communities to accept hazardous facilities than they are in affluent communities” (p. 142). Taylor identifies potential “trade offs” communities make that allow for the siting of certain facilities: health risks, jobs, and economic incentives such as better schools and recreational amenities (p. 142). However, Taylor makes it explicit to note that most of the communities do not willingly welcome facilities and agencies that have negative environmental impact.

The turbulent relationship between Chevron and Richmond’s city council often receives national news, as can be noted in an article published in *The Nation* that sheds light on the then possibility of Chevron “retak[ing]” Richmond if the progressives were defeated in that fall’s election (Early, 2014, p. 18). Chevron has been heavily pushing to implement its “Modernization Plan,” which would include refining heavier, cheaper, and cruder oil (p. 98). As a result, Richmond residents would be breathing more toxic, poisonous air (p. 19). According to current mayor elect Tom Butt, regarding Chevron’s active presence in the election process “...all the billboards of Richmond’s main streets were dominated by Chevron ads and for its preferred city council candidates...there is nowhere you can go to escape the Chevron logo,” which clearly illustrates the oversaturated visibility of the corporation (p. 22). Although Richmond community organizers are well-informed, strong advocates for justice and accountability, and are therefore great resources for national coverage by newspapers and journals to provide visibility of a very serious issue, the information provided may be easily limited to objective details of the issue.

The personal, psychological experience of the “lay people,” as addressed throughout this review may be excluded.

Existing literature has explored the high likelihood and dangers of place-based hazards. There seems to be a trend or emphasis on intersectionality of the factors that exacerbates troubling conditions in communities affected by toxic facilities. Among some of the reasons is basic inequality—whether that is through dynamics between race, class, and a paternalistic relationship between communities and said facilities. Various cases highlight the struggle of communities to obtain recognition, respect, and agency. Additionally, some studies presented the difficulty of creating consciousness of the negative effects of the refinery in the community due to the complexities created by the refinery’s social and political influence. While many factors identified as stressors were covered in existing studies, the voices of those affected by issues of environmental justice were not as prevalent as the more objective information.

The following chapter will present the methodology chosen to conduct the research. Through qualitative research, this researcher will gather narratives from residents and community members that will address the perceived mental health impact of having a toxic refinery in their hometown.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to explore how the presence of the Chevron Oil Refinery in Richmond, CA. influences residents' perceptions of the refinery as a source of psychological stress. Given the documented acknowledgment of the absence of literature examining mental health effects of place-based hazards, such as toxic facilities, on poor communities and communities of color, exposing the voices of those affected and those willing to vocalize their experience will provide an alternative to the refinery's "good neighbor" narrative. Through in-depth interviewing, this researcher explored if and/or how the presence of the oil refinery has shaped the narratives of the city's residents and community members who perceive the refinery as a psychological stressor.

Design

This is a qualitative, inductive study in which this researcher utilized exploratory research methods. A qualitative approach was chosen to gather subjective data detailing the lived experiences of those affected by the refinery's presence. The exploration of "social life as the participants experience it..."(Engel and Schutt, 2013, p. 21), is most appropriate for the purpose of this study. Through intensive interviews, this researcher acquired relevant data to highlight individual experiences of mental stress induced or influenced by the refinery's impact on the community and/or subsequent illnesses caused by pollution. The data this researcher gathered illustrates a breadth of experience as shared through the narratives of the participants themselves. The testimonies that the participants provided, this researcher aimed to understand how the participants constructed their stories and found general themes, differences, and/or commonalities in their narratives.

Using a narrative analysis focuses on the “...story itself and seeks to preserve the integrity of personal biographies or a series of events” (Engel and Schutt, 2013, p. 316). Consistent with conducting a narrative analysis, I classified the stories into general patterns as a coding option. The coding for narrative analyses typically interprets the story as a whole, as opposed to splitting up the conversation into different elements, such as what is done with conversation analysis (p. 316). Since was particularly interested in examining any identified stress through an environmental justice lens, which interrogates the...environmental equity for all groups” (Newton, 2009, p. 291), this researcher explored specific and relevant themes brought up in the narratives of the participants. This researcher reflected on the themes I found in existing literature in comparison to the themes identified in the research I conducted. The data I have collected demonstrates how environmental justice narratives relate (or differ) from existing research of environmental impact in certain communities. The reseracher conducted and narratives I collected provided a great perspective into the lived experiences of the participants as people affected by the presence of the refinery and, if relevant, possible psychological impact. This researcher conducted individual interviews with the participants. All participants were asked questions (see Appendix D) to enable a semi-structured interview, whereby the participant shaped the conversation through a unique narrative. This researcher emphasized the value of experiential knowledge to loosen focus on set questions.

Sample

Participants needed to satisfy the following criteria. Participants consisted of individuals willing to share their experience(s) as influenced by the presence of the Richmond, CA. Chevron Oil

Refinery:

- Must be resident of Richmond or spend a great amount of time in the community as part of the anti-Chevron activism
- Must identify as individual affected by the refinery's toxic presence (psychologically, physically, or physiologically)
- Participants identified as "residents" must identify as people of color, low-income, or as active participants in community development.
 - Although Richmond is not exclusively a community of color and does have some diversity in economic status, the goal is to center the narratives of historically disenfranchised or neglected communities (i.e. communities of color, low-income whites and non-whites). Therefore, residents of color and/or poor residents would be given priority to participate if they identify experiencing psychological stress due to the refinery's presence and actions.
- If the individual identifies as an expert, it must be in relevant fields (Environmental Science, Public Health, Sociology, Psychology)
- Must be 18 years old or older

I used purposive and snowball sampling since I had a specific target population and recruited through specific organizations that are active in the environmental justice movement in Richmond and have contact with affected individuals. There are many social justice organizations in the area that incorporate community members into their movements. Purposive, non-probability sampling was used, since I was looking for a particular experience. As suggested by Engel and Schutt (2013), it is advised that respondents should be "knowledgeable about the cultural arena or situation experience being studied, willing to talk, and represent[ative of] the range of points of view" when utilizing purposive sampling (Pp. 126).

During the recruitment phase, the respondents satisfied any of the advisable points to proceed with the collection of narratives. I contacted an activist, grassroots group that has been very active in campaigns against Chevron initiatives and was able to interview members.

Additionally one of the participants who is well connected to the social justice/community

activism groups in the city provided me with the contact information of people who would seem willing to participate—namely activists, local politicians, and non-profit members. As a life-long resident of the city, I also reached out to people who could possibly connect me with participants willing to share their experiences. I experienced some difficulty in acquiring participants, which I expected to some degree since the environmental issue in Richmond is controversial. As will be described in different sections in this study, many participants described a conflicted relationship often requiring people to compromise certain beliefs in order to acquire benefits of the city's neighbor.

Data Collection

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to 2.5 hours. 7/8 of interviews were recorded via audio recorder since it seemed to appropriate and feasible in collecting my data. Extensive note taking for the single interview was used for the single interview that was not recorded due to logistical reasons. During and after each interview, I kept track of questions or themes I thought would be interesting to explore with other participants. The semi-structured question(s) provided a basic framework to begin the exploration of the narratives. However, each participant's interview proved to be unique. Each interview was transcribed in its entirety to explore the significance of the narrative as a whole.

I designated a coding number to each participant and coded his or her corresponding transcript using the same number. I ensured that my recordings were preceded with the code I have used in order to assure confidentiality. I kept the recordings and transcripts in a secure location in my home. Using designated coding numbers, I maintained confidentiality. Given the great amount of controversy connected to the refinery and those active in the anti-Chevron

movement, some of my participants emphasized more vague identifying/demographical information since there have been personal attacks on certain individuals in the past.

Limitations I noticed were some unwillingness of participants to discuss their mental health needs in depth. Some interviews become more focused on collective, community trauma as opposed to individual experiences. Gathering data specifically addressing psychological consequences proved to be more difficult and was not a topic some of the participants elaborated on in depth in comparison to other questions answered.

Discussion

There were inherent biases in the study since my focus of connecting mental health, environmental justice, the subjective experience of people of color and/or people with lower socioeconomic status (SES) was also one of the focus points of established and well-versed activists in social justice matters in the community. They already identified the presence of the refinery as a strong source of stress in the community and were very critical in their critiques—which is what attracted this researcher to conduct research involving environmental justice and mental health. Obtaining more neutral views was not considered, which could have challenged the narratives I collected. It was noticeable that some participants were hesitant to frame the issue as an “environmental racism issue.” Given the nature of the study, some questions seemed to be leading; therefore possibly shaping the narrative in a slightly different way than it would have developed more organically. A bias necessary to address is the fact that I am from this city and have specific political views of the refinery’s presence. I was hypercritical of the phrasing of language when conducting the interviews to avoid influencing the respondent’s narrative

Mental health and psychology as a whole are sensitive subjects for many people. Therefore, participants ran the risk of feeling triggered, such as being emotionally or psychologically uncomfortable. I prefaced the interviews with stating explicitly and broadly that I was well aware that mental health is a sensitive topic and wanted to be respectful of their experiences. I articulated that there are certain traumas that may be tied to my subject; therefore I encouraged them to consider whether or not they wished to share their narratives. I also shared a pamphlet of accessible resources if they felt uncomfortable at any point during the interview (see Appendix C).

I hope this study will serve to empower the stories of my participants since *they* are the ones providing knowledge. Centering their narratives and emphasizing that their participation can potentially highlight an area for society to address and ameliorate may bring them a sense of community responsibility, or rather community solidarity. I also hope to normalize mental health ailments in hopes of lessening the stigma and increasing the likelihood that some residents will be open to support if needed.

In summary, this study aimed to highlight the effects of larger systemic forces on the mental health of individuals subjected to place-based hazards, such as environmental pollution caused by powerful entities. This study hopes to further contribute to the many studies that contend that environmental racism is a real, living phenomenon in need of a mental health focus. In terms of the social work field, if a client's environmental is important and necessary in understanding their mental health status, then being aware of the residents' constructions of their narratives in relation to environmental exploitation is crucial.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Purpose of Study

This chapter presents the findings from eight semi-structured interviews conducted with residents and/or community members (participants with significant presence in Richmond, i.e. community organizers, activists, etc.). Interviews were guided by questions exploring participants' personal experiences in relation to the Chevron Oil Refinery's presence and its effect on health—particularly and specifically focused on psychological impact. While all participants addressed the impact of having a toxic refinery in the community on their psychological health, all 8 of the participants seemed to explore the macro level impact that shapes the city's social, economic, and political climate in greater depth. The aforementioned societal factors were used to explain the state of community health in a collective sense. Their descriptions provided context for the exploration of the psychological impact on individuals as shaped by intersectional factors.

Due to the success of snowball sampling within the community organizing communities, the study was limited to those active in various social justice efforts—providing narratives with many similarities and understandings of the impact of Chevron as a stressor in the community. The participants identified various factors indicative of their own health concerns, as well as health issues of the community as a whole. The participants were asked how they would characterize Richmond and presented a variety of conceptions of their surroundings.

The most salient themes present in their narratives that characterize the refinery as a stressor include 1) Richmond's environmental characteristics, 2) paternalism, 3) lack of

accountability, 4) neglect, 5) physical and mental health, and 6) racism from an intersectional perspective. Using narrative analyses, whereby experiential knowledge is considered valuable, the responses of the participants were coded and analyzed to further understand how and if Chevron was perceived and identified as a psychological stressor by the participants.

Demographic Data

All of the participants were involved in community justice and/or community organizing work in different capacities. Five out of eight participants identified as people of color who are currently residents or were at some point in their lives. Only one participant of the five people of color in the study no longer lives in Richmond. The remaining three respondents identified as white. Two thirds of the white participants were both activists and residents who were both working professionals in the nonprofit sector. The remaining White participant has a decades-long, deep involvement in community activism in Richmond, but is not a resident. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 71 years old, with an average age of 34.5.

All participants discussed the significant presence of the Richmond Progressive Alliance, a political group deeply involved in the grassroots efforts against Chevron's political influence, as incredibly relevant in understanding the community's complicated relationship with the refinery. Four out of eight participants identified as members or past members of this specific group, which will be discussed in later portions of the study. None of the participants identified as living in poverty. Two of the participants were AmeriCorps members, therefore barely living about the poverty line. For detailed information on each participants' demographic information, please refer to Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participants	Age	M/F	Person of Color*	White	Resident	Community Member/Non-resident	Occupation
Participant 1	27	M		X	X		Community Organizer, Academic
Participant 2	30	M	X		X		Activist, Artist
Participant 3	60	M	X		X		Activist, Non-profit
Participant 4	22	F	X		X		AmeriCorps member
Participant 5	25	F	X		X		AmeriCorps member
Participant 6	71	F		X		X	Activist, Retired teacher
Participant 7	41	M		X	X		Director of non-profit organization
Participant 8	25	M	X		X		Community Organizer

Interview Format

The project’s goal was explained to each participant as an effort to collect narratives from residents and community members who perceived Chevron as a psychological stressor—whose definition was open for interpretation. While often worded differently, the guiding questions

sought to explore the following: experience in the community—whether that be as a resident or “community member,” relation to the refinery, type of work and/or involvement in the community, noticeable manifestations of Chevron’s presence or influence in the city, interpretation of own and/or community health conditions (physical or mental health) as possibly affected by the refinery’s presence, role of race/racism affected by conditions of the city, and perceptions of recent transformative occurrences. After coding the interviews, the most salient responses were sorted into specific, thematic categories. The themes indicated some level of stress in their experiences of living in Richmond or being extensively active in the community.

Major Findings

Construction of Richmond’s environmental characteristics.

All participants described the general demographic of the city in terms of racial and economic make-up. Respondents identified Richmond as an economically disadvantaged city. Participant 1, a twenty-eight year-old white community activist and relatively recent resident, explained, “...the fact is that actually the refinery benefits from poverty. It benefits from a city that has low educational attainment that has high anxiety, high unemployment...” in reference to the city’s characteristics and the refinery’s gains from the social conditions of the city. Participant 2, a thirty year-old activist of color and resident of over 20 years, discussed examples of economic stressors and shared that community development seemed to be lacking. He cited having 64 liquor stores and one grocery store for the entire city as indicative of collective poor health. He shared that “it’s kind of the same shit. The lack of food...lack of good soil....A lot of the places here don’t have good soil.” He mentioned poor soil as affected by toxic pollutants in

reference to his work as an environmental activist who helped plant gardens in the city. Four participants noted changes in community demographics—slow-paced gentrification—as an increasing stressor to this community with limited housing options in the San Francisco Bay Area. Participant 6, a seventy year-old white woman who is a decades-long Richmond community organizer, but not a resident, summed up that Chevron is “Poisoning the community. Poisoning the Earth.”

Influence and Power.

While not specifically termed in this manner, all participants discussed Chevron profiting from poverty, or what some stated as “profit over people.” Whether through politics, intersectional oppression, and/or influencing various institutions to the refinery’s benefit, all participants identified Chevron as a powerful and highly influential neighbor. Participant 5, a twenty-five year-old life-long resident of color and AmeriCorps member, responded to the “controversial question” of whether the location of the refinery was chosen intentionally in certain communities or if the communities happen to reside in close proximity by stating that

It is tricky right? Because Chevron has been there since the beginning of Richmond and so it did not necessarily happen to be because it [community of color] was there. It was going to be cheaper to live in Richmond then other places and people of color are there...sometimes you just have to pay for a cheaper place.

Six out of seven participants shared the concept of not having a choice to move for a variety of reasons. Participant 4 cited economic reasons for living in the most affected area, North Richmond, because her mother could not afford housing elsewhere. Participant 3, a sixty year-old life-long resident of color and community activist, provided insight he learned as a

Richmond native and shared that “[Residents] are aware that they live in a risky area, but it is home. You learn to adapt.” Participant 4 explained why her family had to move into a highly affected area by stating that

...a part of why we moved there was because housing was like a really difficult living situation for my mom and that’s like the only place she could be...It’s like a thing [explosions] that triggers and stays with you for the entire time you live there. And you know, it makes you more aware of...how does it affect your health...there could be a flare at any moment, you know, what’s gonna happen?

As a response to how Chevron exercises its power over the community’s narrative, Participant 8, a twenty-five year-old biracial (Black and white) community activist and life-long resident of Richmond, shared

...the fact that Chevron is framing this as workers versus environment is fucked up on their part, because they’re a multi-billion dollar institution. They have more than enough money to fix that refinery and more than enough money to provide jobs for people that live in Richmond.

Additionally, Participant 8 and, Participant 6 identified local politicians, who receive contributions from Chevron, as enablers of Chevron’s political prowess. According to Participant 7, a 41-year-old white director of a non-profit and recent resident, Chevron in the past had a desk in the City Manager’s office—influencing decision-making. Participant 8 shared that the prospective Chevron-backed candidate for the mayor’s seat in 2014 stated that “if I become mayor, I am going to sit down with Chevron and ask them ‘What is the vision that Chevron has for Richmond and how can Richmond help them?’” As explored with all participants, Participant 8 perceived Chevron’s presence as complex and dynamic in a conflicted manner, in that some

believed it necessary to cater to the refinery's needs. Participant 2 described a power dynamic that created a constricted environment for those receiving aid from Chevron.

All I want to do is community work. Next thing you know you're getting deeply involved into a deeper hole, you know? You're touching subjects that people will quickly tell you not to talk about. It's crazy. Shit, I would've never thought this in my life. (laughs). It exists. It definitely exists here in Richmond. I'm pretty sure It's going to continue to exist. It's been existing for many years.

Participant 2 added that many of the non-profits that receive money from Chevron are "poverty pimps," meaning that they could not or do not fully invest in the community because they have to support themselves first.

Participant 5 discussed the news source funded by Chevron and its impact on the city's reputation:

Some people do not care that Richmond Standard is fully funded by Chevron and that they are totally shaping the narrative and they are like "oh it is just a news source." I think it is so weird. I think it is their way of convincing people that everything is ok...that is mental health... you can convince someone they are okay when they are not, that sort of serves the function.

Paternalism.

Explicitly stated by Participant 1, but described in a fitting manner by all participants, paternalism seemed to be a powerful structure present in the relationship between the city and Chevron. Many shared that despite feeling like Chevron is a definite stressor, it is also an entity

that funds some beneficial social projects, as well as paying a significant amount of taxes to the city. Participants cited necessary funding for non-profits, community projects, and funding for schools and students. Participant 4, a twenty-two year-old life-long resident of color and AmeriCorps member and Participant 5 both shared that they have benefitted from scholarships funded by Chevron. Participant 5 stated

...if you're a kid from Richmond, you've heard all your life [Chevron] contributes to asthma, but then you get to high school and they're offering these thousand, five-hundred dollar scholarships. How are you supposed to feel about it?...Maybe at the end of the day, you can get a kid into high school or college, but at what expense of their health? I feel like a lot of what they do might be to like, and I don't want to say it's too distract you, but often it's to kind of have some leverage...forgetting something happened in the city.

In reference to receiving funding, Participant 2 shared his experience with the refinery's complex paternalistic pull by stating that "...everybody thinks you're a sellout...It's tricky.... You can't say shit. I can't tell my boss, 'why the fuck are you accepting money from Chevron? I can't do that. I'm going to get fired, you know? That's stressful for me.'" As previously stated and quoted, Participant 8 described the relationship as a complex binary of "worker versus environment," and described Chevron as a huge "economic engine" that often forces a choice between jobs or the environment.

Participant 2 elaborated on tangible ways in which Chevron extends its economic power in various capacities in his experience as an activist —namely as a community organizer and as an artist painting murals depicting the reality of living in Richmond, including a mural he painted years ago as commentary on Chevron's presence. When asked how he has interpreted Chevron's

influence in his own experience as someone who has worked with non-profits receiving funding and in his personal observations as an almost life-long resident he stated that

It might...just seem like “oh, they are just polluting our environment...” but it goes so much deeper than that. Into the politics, the non-profits. It seeps into everything literally, literally. Like down to the liquor stores, down to every nook and cranny of the city, into the communities, through every member. They go out here handing free Chevron t-shirts like they are the shit, you know? You aint shit. But yet again they pass....that’s the effect the Chevron has.

For participant 8, he believes “There is something of a divide in the community. On the one hand we got like ‘We need our health and safety’...on the other hand you have the people that’s like ‘You can’t drive away Chevron...Without Chevron, Richmond would be screwed.’” Participant 1 addressed how taxes fit into the paternalistic relationship, stating that

The arguments have to do with that they provide jobs, they pay 40% of the city’s budget in terms of taxes, even like loyalists’ positions revolve around those two facts. Like, “why would we be disrespectful for a corporate entity that provides these things for us?”..... Highly paternalistic. But the thing is, it’s all propaganda basically. Only about 5% of jobs at the refinery are for Richmond residents. So, first of all they aren’t providing jobs for us.

Providing that statement, Participant 1 also brought up the argument that Chevron does not actually provide jobs for residents—meaning that Chevron’s claim of providing jobs is highly contested.

Lack of accountability.

Five out of eight participants discussed the prevalence of the lack of accountability and stress caused by Chevron’s hesitance to acknowledge the full impact of its toxic pollution. In

response to questions about her observations of times in which residents voiced their grievances and issues in city council meetings, specifically a meeting following a major explosion, Participant 5 shared “There were people that were giving real testimonials and afterwards there was this count of number of people who went to the hospital with like asthma and things like that and I think it got written off.” In another excerpt she shared that

People were definitely really mad, and they definitely did not feel like anyone was being held accountable...I think those things together, the feeling that something's has happen to you and no one is doing anything about it and you do not feel like you have the power to do anything about it, is definitely stressful.

Participant 5 shared that “... for mental health, I think because of a combination of folks who don't take mental health seriously plus the fact that Chevron doesn't make that accountable...it is overlooked.” Participant 8 offered his perspective of not being necessarily “anti-Chevron” because of what is happening in the community, but

...like anti-tactics of what Chevron's doing...stop spending millions and millions of dollars in lobbying and trying to get out of paying taxes and bribing legislators and other government officials to do your bidding. Stop spending so much money to bribe people to get people to do your bidding. Actually pay your taxes and take time to have an actual inspection done of that refinery and fix it up. Update it.

Participant 8 emphasized that the refinery's presence was not fleeting and suggested holding its actions accountable. Throughout many of the narratives, many participants described feeling like accountability is not being taken and is often not requested.

Participant 8 shared that

...it's empowering to see people who want to stand up. But it's also disempowering when it's hard to find ways to really regulate them and hold them accountable....there's just a lot of people who are afraid to step up to Chevron because they're afraid that they're going to leave.

Participant 6 believes that there exists a “bought silence” in the city due to Chevron’s financial contributions and false narrative of being a “good neighbor.”

Neglect.

Since Chevron is Richmond’s “neighbor,” four participants discussed the refinery’s neglect of safety, which affects the city in multiple ways. A mixture of responses provided insight into the concept of community “consciousness” of the refinery’s stressful impact.

Participant 4 described hearing testimonies from fellow residents that highlighted environmental neglect and described the toxic conditions of the community:

...as someone who attends a lot of neighborhood meetings for my work...people come and sometimes they come in with this frustration and say things that don't make sense but they come because it's the only place they can vent really. To tell someone: “this is going on, why isn't anyone helping me?” There is a lady in North Richmond who lives next to an empty, vacant lot, and she's been worried about that lot for months because people like to illegal dump there, dump things, and it's not just garbage but it's also like, some people have dumped things like road kill and it's like, you know, you don't want to see that. And she's a really involved community member and she's asked a few times for the supervisor's office, she wants to do something with that lot but I found out later on that that lot is actually really toxic. You know you can't even plant things there. It's not safe for folks to be on. People want to do something about it, but it is toxic. But, also, why is it toxic?

Participant 7 and 3 shared that Chevron did not fulfill the expectation of helping the city keep one of its important hospitals open. They cited community neglect and intentional neglect by the Chevron after the amassed support of the progressive politicians.

Recent transformative periods.

In 2012 and 2014, Richmond experienced two impactful periods involving Chevron's influence and impact on the city. In 2012, a major explosion took place that reportedly sent 15,000 residents to the hospital. All participants articulated, whether as a response to my questions or independently including it in other parts of their narratives, that this single event impacted the health and politics of the city to a great extent. Participant 1, who lives extremely close to the refinery, shared that

...I turned my head and saw that basically the city was on fire and I just kept driving..... But I do know, you know, that my neighbors had to line up in their cars and had to just sit they're like fucking, while the sky is falling. They had to wait to leave, basically.

Participant 2, who has lived through multiple explosions and alluded to these situations being the norm, responded that

...everything pretty much went into the community. All we saw was this huge black cloud. Pretty much slowly creeping over the whole city of Richmond, so and all that lands everywhere. The smell...you're like, what the hell is going on?

Participant 4 shared that initially, Chevron was reportedly stating that all was fine and that it was just part of the everyday pollution, which people also fail to acknowledge as equally

problematic. Participant 7 shared that he would never forget the day of the explosion. He explained that it caused him to increasingly worry about his health. As someone who frequented community forums after the explosion, Participant 5 shared that a woman near the refinery expressed, "...it is not fair for my house to become a prison; it is not fair for the corporation to basically lock me in my house..." when addressing how dangerous the environment became after the explosion.

The election of 2014 marked a very important period for Richmond. All participants addressed Chevron's effort to "buy" the election as it poured \$3 million into supporting certain candidates. As identified by all participants, many of them were part of the grassroots efforts to defeat Chevron-backed candidates during that election year. All participants identified the progressive activist group, which was able to get three of its members elected, as a major political force since they were able to beat the aggressiveness of the Chevron-backed campaigns.

Participants mentioned that the oversaturation of mailers, propaganda, and purchase of almost every single billboard in the city worked against the Chevron-backed candidates. Participant 5 discussed feeling angry at the campaigning strategies utilized by Chevron-backed candidates. She stated that

[Chevron-backed candidates] did not even have real support. They were paying people to support [Chevron-backed candidates]. That felt like a symbolic campaign...you guys paying someone to stand at a gas station; you guys suck.

Following the lost election, three out of eight participants spoke of the failed Community Benefits Agreement in which Chevron did not help keep the local hospital opened, as it was believed it would.

Three out of eight participants described the “Health-in-All” policies that the city is adopted in which it centralizes health as the top priority in any resolution passed or project approved. They described feeling hopeful that the unhealthiness of the city, including pollution and stress, was being addressed.

Racism and racial dynamics.

All participants were specifically asked about racism, race, and environmental racism. Three out of eight participants identified racial tension existing between the more conservative, black city pro-Chevron city council members and other groups (opposing group dependent upon issue in question). Participant 8 differentiated himself by explicitly stating that he did not believe all black members on city council represented the needs or opinions of all black residents. However, he did discuss a divide between black and white residents since they had differing perspectives or focuses in the Chevron debate; jobs versus the environment.

Participants 1 and 3 also discussed racial divide due to differential perceptions of the refinery’s presence, which affected the political process and political climate. According to Participant 1, Chevron’s support of specific, well-known black candidates drives wedges between the community. Participant 6 acknowledged that the influential group of progressives was lacking in diversity. She stated, “We are all old white people. Let’s do something,” in regards to community engagement in the grassroots movement.

Considering environmental racism and its possible exacerbation by the Chevron refinery, all eight respondents elaborated on intersectional definitions, observations and experiences of residents in Richmond. Participant 4 elaborated on a “race-based medicine” argument she

believed is used to explain the high prevalence of illnesses plaguing Richmond, such as asthma and cancer. She stated that

Some people say it's like a genetic thing, but as soon as you start going into race-based medicine, or practicing medicine according to race, it's not as helpful as you think it will be. People can come up with a million excuses or statistics as to why that is, but at the end of the day, environmental racism comes from years and years of like forming it out that way. During WW2, who were the folks who came to Richmond? A lot of African-American folks who couldn't live anywhere else, so how does that shape what Richmond is today?

In the above statement, Participant 4 posited a connection between chronic illnesses believed to be naturally more prevalent in the Black community and long-term exposure to toxic chemicals.

Participant 2 was more direct about the impact Chevron had in the racism or oppression in Richmond. In regards to the needs of the community, he posited, "Why not bring another grocery store? But, they don't see that. It is oppressing the people." He referenced his comment about there being 64 liquor stores and one grocery store. He believed there was a connection between the neglect of the community as a consequence of catering to Chevron's political needs. Later, he described additional factors that maintain the status quo:

I mean, I can see [lack of resistance] being over here more. Just because people are obviously less educated. You know, your common stereotypes for a poor neighborhood. You obvious are not going to get much fight back out here as you would in a much richer neighborhood.

According to Participant 6, in her experience people of color are less likely to attend protests because they have to ask for services that will best help them on a personal level, such as safe jobs, education, and less of a police presence in their communities.

Participant 7 believed that the situation with Chevron “advances environmental racism” and produces a “strain on community health.”

Health and Stress.

All participants addressed health in some capacity due to direct questions and emphasis on it being the focus of the interview. All participants addressed the commonly acknowledged fact that Richmond has a high rate of asthma and other autoimmune diseases. Participant 2 shared that he and “everyone [he] knew” has asthma due to living in the city for an extended period of time. Participant 2 stated that “...our people are not conscious to the fact that this company is really doing all this shit. People are not worried about that. People are worried about surviving out here” when exploring community perceptions of psychological stress. The theme of consciousness was explored and established that people are, indeed, stressed by their environment. However, some of the participants acknowledged that people often do not recognize that their health issues are related to the unhealthy conditions possibly influenced by Chevron. Five out of eight participants named anger as a reaction to Chevron as a stressor, while four out of eight named anxiety as a reaction. Participant shared

I don't necessarily sit in a continuous state of anxiety or trauma about it, but [it] definitely crosses my mind...So, yeah, my answer is kind of no because I haven't been here long enough to see it... the more accurate emotion to describe more than anxiety is...I cannot convey how continuously pissed off I am on a daily basis about this fact.

From a community activist and resident perspective, Participant 8 shared that

...anytime that there has been like smoke of flames coming from there, everybody gets stressed out because they don't want to see that thing blow up again. They don't want to see a bunch of people go to the hospital and they don't want their

own personal health to be impacted, too...I've seen a few people like, come to meetings wearing face masks because, you know, they're afraid for their health...there's a lot of people that express anxiety and fear for their health. That's why there's like, a huge movement to get them to like, fix that refinery because there's just a huge concern about health. There are not a lot of people that feel safe when the air that they're actually breathing in Richmond.

Participant 4 identified the absence in discussion of mental health as culture specific.

According to Participant 4, mental health is "...not taken serious in the Latino community, not talked about as actual thing...why it's not even discussed in the first place. Connections aren't made..." when questioning whether the Latino community worries about the presence of the refinery. As someone who formally lived in the neighborhood closest to the refinery, she shared (in third person):

It did freak me out to be living so close to the refinery. You know you hear, even like in elementary school... I remember the explosion that happened in the nineties...I remember I was in elementary school. So you hear about all this stuff that goes on in the flares and like people have higher rates of like lung cancer and like all these like respiratory diseases so it obviously freaks you out...

Several participants spoke of a self-blame they have noticed among people who have certain diseases. Participant 5 shared that upon community organizing throughout the city, she found the people would blame their asthma on themselves. For example, Participant 5 explained that that a woman stated,

...I have asthma but my closets are dusty", and the next person would be like "yeah I have asthma, but I inherited it". You talk to every single person and you are like every single one of you has asthma and every single one of you think it is your fault, if you ever came together and realized [that].

Participant 3, whose family has a long history in Richmond, shared that he and his family living in Richmond all have illnesses that no one in his extended family (who do not live in Richmond) have. He specifically believes that the cancer and cirrhosis in his family stem from breathing toxins for decades.

Participant 6 identified poverty in its entirety as traumatic and is compounded by Chevron's "profit over people" model. Participant 6 stated that "poverty kills" when discussing the stress associated with autoimmune diseases that are prominent paired with social stressors, such as violence and the lack of resources, in Richmond's communities. Participant 1 discussed secondary stress influenced by Chevron's presence in social situations, such as employing divisive tactics when juxtaposing economic benefits the refinery provides versus environmentalists who antagonize the refinery from continuing to provide funding for various initiatives. He stated

...health impact is not just what goes in and out of your lungs, right? Health also includes social connection, community, authentic relationships, and our ability to have those things. Corporate forces can and do significantly impact. They make it hard for us to relate as a city. I think that is the greatest health impact, actually, in many respects.

When addressing if Chevron was perceived as a stressor within his community, Participant 2 said, "Maybe not everybody in the community. But, I'm pretty sure people who are in the non-profit sector...feel it from both sides. Pretty sure. Very positive they do. And that's mental stress. Mental everything." Participant 2 later addressed how his own health was affected stated that

I'm not going to say like directly, like "Chevron came into my house and like threatened me!" No, obviously not. They are not going to do that. It's all subliminal. It's like a silent killer. Chevron is the person that is going to smile in your face and stab you in the back. That's what Chevron is to Richmond.

Summary

As can be noted, many complexities were made evident when attempting to decode what participants considered the psychological, stressful impact of Chevron's presence in Richmond. While not explicitly stated, the stress—caused by compounding social issues—was addressed by all participants in a multitude of ways. The participants' accounts of their experiences in Richmond yielded similar themes, possibly correlating with the community organizing or involvement in activist circles. All participants consider themselves conscious of issues surrounding Chevron and its impact on every facet of the city—including mental health. They all consider Chevron's presence a stressor in some way, however their answers, wording, and final conception varied. Overall, Chevron as a psychological stressor and its impact on mental health seemed to have a broad and complicated interpretation among the participants. The four salient themes identified that help shape the mental health narratives of the participant or exacerbate stress include: 1) Richmond's environmental characteristics, 2) paternalism, 3) lack of accountability, 4) neglect, 5) physical and mental health, and 6) racism from an intersectional perspective.

The following significant themes that emerged from these categories include) paternalism, 2) lack of accountability, 3) physical and mental health, and 4) racism from an intersectional perspective will be explored to discuss significant findings.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The objective of this qualitative study was to gather mental health narratives of the residents and community members of Richmond, California--with a focus on exploring how they have perceived Chevron as a possible mental health stressor. If Chevron was identified as a stressor impacting the health of the participants, further exploration was encouraged. All eight participants willingly addressed, to some extent, the impact of having a toxic refinery in the community on their psychological health.

All of the participants identified Chevron as a definite stressor and believed that they were affected to some degree by the stress that accompanies living or being heavily involved in a city that is heavily polluted by a powerful corporation with great political clout. All of the participants were open to providing their interpretations of conditions of that may exacerbate the impact of environmental pollution and corporate power on their mental health, as well as physical health. Their descriptions provided context for the exploration of the psychological impact on individuals as shaped by intersectional, societal factors, such as the politics, economics, and social climate of the city. The participants identified various factors indicative of their own physical and mental health concerns, as well as health issues of the community as a whole.

This chapter will discuss the most salient themes present in the participants' narratives and will provide an analysis of how the existing literature supports or lacks the experiential perspective of people who feel the influential and powerful presence of a toxic refinery in their community. The themes that characterize the refinery as a stressor, as identified by the

participants, include 1) paternalism, 2) lack of accountability, 3) physical and mental health, and 4) racism from an intersectional perspective. Using narrative analyses, whereby experiential knowledge is considered valuable, the responses of the participants were coded and used to further understand how and if Chevron was perceived and identified as a psychological stressor by the participants.

Key Findings to Existing Literature

Paternalism

All participants discussed the present and salient conflict that is often divisive and stressful for the city: the economic benefit generated from the refinery's presence vs. community activist fighting to have just environmental and social conditions. Chevron, as expected, fails to recognize the negative impact of its refinery, such as pollution, corruption, and manipulation. Chevron provides resources that the community needs and all participants acknowledged this complex struggle. Publicly portrayed in Chevron propaganda, a strong emphasis is placed on the funding they (Chevron) provide the city (Chevron Richmond, 2015). The literature that I reviewed does not go into depth about the underlying dynamics between an economically disadvantaged city and a corporate giant. Some participants explored how poverty enables the magnitude of Chevron's influence and power over the decision—mainly through decision-making and politics since residents and community leaders feel like they are in a bind. Poverty paired with environmental injustice seemed to be a key point that participants identified as stressful and straining, which the literature supports.

As described by participants, the refinery's influence in the city's social, economic, and political life seemed to be conveyed through the description of a dichotomous relationship that

has grown tense over the years: economic benefit versus environmental well-being. Participants portrayed that the two factors are often juxtaposed and manipulated to fit the agenda of the powerful--Chevron. Since Richmond is known to be a city with a high percentage of people of color, they are deeply affected by both environmental exploitation and by the toxic areas they are forced to inhabit due to economic limitations, which also resonates with the “place-based” concept. Participants asserted that Chevron’s long-time presence makes it a very dangerous and powerful neighbor.

All participants discussed the present and salient conflict that is often divisive and stressful for the city: the economic benefit generated from the refinery’s presence vs. community activist fighting to have Chevron address the negative impact of its refinery, such as pollution, corruption, and manipulation. Chevron provides resources that the community needs and all participants acknowledged this complex struggle. Many of the participants described a compromised relationship existing between the refinery and the city. Participants shared that despite feeling like Chevron is a definite stressor, it is also an entity that funds some beneficial social projects, as well as paying a significant amount of taxes to the city. Not only is it “profit over people,” but also a sense of entitlement to utilize the city as described by a number of participants. According to the participants, this relationship becomes stressful when having to maneuver economic need and environmental justice. Again, the literature is missing a critique of how the conflicted relationship and struggled with toxic facilities like Chevron create a stressful environment.

Accountability or Lack thereof

Consistent with the articles published on the victories of the progressive movement in Richmond in both the historic election of 2014 and the increase in visibility, residents identified the rise in the anti-Chevron movement as important players in community development and empowerment. The participants attested to the importance of these movements in their testimonies and many of them encouraged this researcher to make the study public to continue the conversation about Chevron's impact on the community. The study by Johnson et. al (2008), suggests that environmental justice through the use of the community itself is an absolute need. As can be noted in the 2014 election in Richmond whereby the grassroots movement was able to defeat a \$3 million dollar campaign funded by Chevron, the alleviation of societal injustice (in its many manifestations) can come from those who organize the community and bring awareness to the issues of environmental justice. By engaging in environmental justice work, stress caused by the lack of accountability taken by the refinery can be addressed through direct action as was noted in the newspaper articles reviewed by this researcher. The academic literature had limited information about how the community was holding the refineries or toxic facilities accountable for many social issues, but especially lacked the mental health perspective of these issues and anger, anxiety, and fear that followed living near a toxic facility produced.

Racism

Consistent with studies conducted that identified trend of the correlation of toxic facilities existing near communities of color (Miller & Garran, 2008, Arrigo, 2015, Johnson et. al, 2008, Martin & Do, 2014) and, therefore highlighting environmental racism as a stressor, some participants acknowledged that people of color in Richmond are often relegated to living near the most toxic and polluted areas of the city. Although residents did not openly or explicitly address psychological impact of racism on their health, they acknowledged that racism deeply affects

people who reside in Richmond. The city did not let Richmond, as Taylor suggests that some cities do because of the need for economic stability, however it is learning to work with a toxic refinery that is not only responsible for many social problems, such as the epidemic of asthma or the city's intense dependence on taxes, it is also responsible for an often divided community along racial lines.

Research conducted by Martin and Do support the participants claims that "...in examining environmental racism it is important to consider the 'structure of space, the historic stigmatization of blacks within the white political community, the resulting partitioned ethic, all need to be take into account into understanding the distribution of pollution' (p.23).

Articles published in Richmond and reviewed for this study support racial tension as a major source of stress for the political realm. This, too, was perceived as racial oppression antagonized by Chevron given the supposed conscious effort to divide the community. According to the participants and the articles, a focus is placed on support the conservative faction of Black politicians by Chevron, which then prevents coalition building within city hall.

Health and Stress

Many of the participants described insidious and unseen ways in which Chevron's presence is connected to many social issues that exacerbate both physical health and mental health: manifested through the lack of access to grocery stores and greenways (Participant 2), divided communities along racial lines (Participants 1 and 6), family health trends unique to member living in Richmond (Participant 3), political climate and pressure (all participants), and intersectional oppression. The exploration of racial divide within communities of color was not addressed in the studies I found. The article written by Clark, Anderson, Clark & Williams

(1999) suggests that both Black and other ethnic minorities similarly feel psychologically impacted when it comes to “felt” racism, which seems to encourage an exploration into both. This is not implying that racial divide can be alleviated once accepting that both parties suffer similarly, however it provides a possible area to explore in regards to why there is such a division in Richmond. In other words, exploring how differently the divided groups experience racism in Richmond and why the Chevron issue clearly separates the groups.

A participant identified guilt and self-blame as a seemingly coping strategy some residents of Richmond utilize when asked about their health issues. Interestingly enough and as made evident in the literature review of this study, Clark, Anderson, Clark & Williams contend that when racism is felt or perceived by ethnic minorities, denial is a common coping mechanism. The authors suggest that this action further maintains the structures that perpetuate racism—contributing to negative health effects, which the researchers chose to explore the psychological repercussion of racism. Some of the participants suggested that Richmond, indeed, is a victim of environmental racism and is therefore easily exploited. One of the participants shared that throughout her work in community organizing, denial and blame are common responses residents provide when addressing their health problems that are highly correlated with the proximity of Chevron to communities of color.

Given the connection provided by the aforementioned article, environmental racism as intersected with mental health could be further explored in future research. As sanctioned by the Environment Protection Agency, it is difficult to prove that an act of environmental racism, which is technically not allowed by the federal government, has occurred because one must prove that a location for a hazardous facility was deliberately chosen based on the racial or class make-up of the area (Taylor, 2014, p. 118), which has made the relationship between Chevron

and the participants more stressful since proving discrimination based on race is not feasible. Taylor (2014) explores in which Title XI helps or does not help communities of color, which supports the now racialized struggle of Richmond residents to pursue their needs that may be dependent on Chevron in some insidious way.

Implications for Social Work

As explored throughout this researcher's project, the mental health of those living near toxic facilities is impacted in a multitude of ways that are often insidious and traumatic. Communities of color and low-income communities (including White communities) are disproportionately affected not only by toxic pollution, but also by various societal factors that impact the livelihoods of residents. As proven in this study, people are willing to describe the stressful and tumultuous realities that grow from environmental stressors such as Chevron, therefore working with the community to address mental health needs exacerbated by living in a community with environmental pollution enabled by paternalistic political and social relationships. As stated by a client, Chevron thrives off of poverty. Therefore, as social workers it is imperative that research helps humanize clients subjected to environmental exploitation.

Study Strengths and Limitations

Despite having a rather small sample, the participants described the various intersecting ways in which Chevron has impacted not only their mental health, whether that be through anxiety, anger, depression related to serious, etc., but also the psychological state of the community as a whole. Mental health can be a very difficult topic to discuss given stigma attached to mental illnesses, and this researcher felt like that was apparent in the interviews. The narratives often veered off towards discussing structural problems and how it affected the social

stability and cohesion of the community. The eight participants were all involved in community organizing and/ or activism, therefore presenting a very limited variety of perspective. However, since many of the participants are well known throughout the city for their leadership, the conversation about mental health and how their own is affecting by their surroundings may encourage others to do the same and demand action. As described by the former Mayor and the willingness of homegrown leader, Henry Clark, testimonies provide windows into the realities of those most affected by environmental exploitation. Many of the studies this researcher found were centered on the scientific, environmental impact of having a toxic facility near marginalized and neglected neighborhoods. This study provides a rich collection of stories directly from “insiders” and may contribute in shaping the overall narrative of city, which is so commonly manipulated and shaped by those who are not aware of the lived and felt reality of the people of Richmond. However, a deeper focus could have been more useful in exploring mental health, which seemed unimportant or rather insignificant to participants who leaned towards larger, systemic issues.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although recruitment was initially difficult, once interviews were conducted with willing participants, the research yielded rich and fruitful narratives of resilience and resistance towards corporate giants. Given the exploitation of the environment and of people subjected to such conditions, it would be of interest to understand how people have been affected not only through statistics and scientific studies of the environment, but also through qualitative studies that grant a space for those affected to share their stories. Through the publication and emphasis on the importance of narratives, as recommended by exiting studies, empowering movements could become.

Conclusion

The study provides insight into how the residents of Richmond, California perceive the Chevron Oil Refinery as a mental health stressor. While not always focused on their individual mental health, the participants elaborated on a collective sense of mental well-being. The participants' focus on structural ways in which Chevron creates stress within the community and how the stress is internalized highlights a need to address social, political, and economic issues through a lens that considers psychological impact in communities with environmental justice issues.

Qualitative interviews exploring the narratives of mental health presented findings that seemed important in explaining why Chevron is a mental health stressor. Themes include 1) paternalism, 2) lack of accountability, 3) physical and mental health, and 4) racism from an intersectional perspective.

References

- Arrigo, B. A., & Lynch, M. J. (2015). The Human Consequences of Ecological Violence and Corporate Victimization: Public Sector Psychology and Green Criminology.
- Barnett, J. T. (2015). Toxic portraits: Resisting multiple invisibilities in the environmental justice movement. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 101*(2), 405-425.
- Brody, J. G., Morello-Frosch, R., Zota, A., Brown, P., Pérez, C., & Rudel, R. A. (2009). Linking exposure assessment science with policy objectives for environmental justice and breast cancer advocacy: The Northern California Household Exposure Study. *American Journal of Public Health, 99*(S3), S600-S609.
- Brown, P., Mayer, B., Zvestoski, S., Luebke, T., Mandelbaum, J., & McCormick, S. (2003). The health politics of asthma: environmental justice and collective illness experience in the United States. *Social science & medicine, 57*(3), 453-464.
- Chevron Richmond. (2015). Education. Retrieved 16 October 2015.
<http://richmond.chevron.com/home/community/education.aspx>
- Chevron Richmond. (2015). The Early Years: 1902-1914. Retrieved 16 October 2015.
http://richmond.chevron.com/home/aboutchevronrichmond/history/history_early_years.aspx
- Chevron Richmond. (2015). Programs. Retrieved 16 October 2015.
<http://richmond.chevron.com/home/community/programs.aspx>
- City of Richmond, Planning and Building Services Department. (2014). City Facts, City of

Richmond, California fact sheet. Retrieved 11 August 2015 from:
<http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/DocumentCenter/Home/View/8348>

City of Richmond, Planning and Building Services Department. (2015). City Facts, City of

Richmond, California fact sheet. Retrieved 10 October 2015 from:
<http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/DocumentCenter/Home/View/8348>

Clark, R., Anderson, N. B., Clark, V. R., & Williams, D. R. (1999). Racism as a stressor for African Americans: A bio psychosocial model. *American psychologist*, 54(10), 805.

Cohen, A., Lopez, A., Malloy, N., & Morello-Frosch, R. (2012). Our environment, Our Health A Community-Based Participatory Environmental Health Survey in Richmond, California. *Health Education & Behavior*, 39(2), 198-209.

Cole, L. W. (1992). Remedies for Environmental Racism: A View from the Field. *Michigan Law Review*, 90(7), 1991-1997.

Cooney, C. M. (1999). Still searching for environmental justice. *Environmental science & technology*, 33(9), 200A-204A.

Corburn, J., Curl, S., & Arredondo, G. (2014). A Health-In-All-Policies Approach Addresses Many Of Richmond, California's Place-Based Hazards, Stressors. *Health Affairs*, 33(11), 1905-1913.

Díaz, A. (1993). Texas Task Force Takes On Environmental Racism. *Race, Poverty & the Environment*, 23-24.

- Early, S. (2014). Will Big Oil Retake Richmond? In 2006, California progressives won control of City Hall. Now Chevron and its allies are spending plenty to get it back. *NATION*, 298(24), 18.
- Engel, R., & Schutt, R. (2013). Sampling. In *The Practice of Research in Social Work* (3rd ed., pp. 110-138). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Godsil, R. D. (1991). Remediating environmental racism. *Michigan Law Review*, 90(2), 394-427.
- Johnson, G. S., Rainey, S. A., & Johnson, L. S. (2008). Dickson, Tennessee and Toxic Wells: An Environmental Racism Case Study. *Race, Gender & Class*, 204-223.
- Juhasz, A. (2008). *The True Cost of Chevron: An Alternative Annual Report*.
Retrieved 07 June 2015. <http://truecostofchevron.com/2009-alternative-annual-report.pdf>
- Kay, J., and Katz, C. (2012). Pollution, Poverty, People of Color: The factory on the hill. Environmental Health News. Retrieved 09 June 2015.
<http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org/ehs/news/2012/pollution-poverty-and-people-of-color-richmond-day-1>
- Knox, A., & Wear, Z. (2014). Richmond progressive forces win decisively. *Social Policy*, 44(4), 16-20.
- Kinman, M., and Juhasz, A. (2009). *The True Cost of Chevron: An Alternative Annual Report*.
Retrieved 07 June 2015 <http://truecostofchevron.com/2011-alternative-annual-report.pdf>
- Kurtis, A. (2015, August 11). Chevron fined for air pollution at Richmond refinery. SFGate.

Retrieved 11 August 2015. <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Chevron-fined-for-air-pollution-at-Richmond-6437988.php>

Laws, M. B., Yeh, Y., Reisner, E., Stone, K., Wang, T., & Brugge, D. (2015). Gender, Ethnicity and Environmental Risk Perception Revisited: The Importance of Residential Location. *Journal of community health, 40*(5), 948-955.

Martin, E., & DO, S. (2014). An Analysis of the Disproportionate Effects of Pollution on Minorities Living in Los Angeles. *Social Policy, 44*(2), 22-30.

Miller & Garran. (2008). *Racism in the United States: Implications for the Helping Professions*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

Mitchell, J. T., Thomas, D. S., & Cutter, S. L. (1999). Dumping in Dixie revisited: The evolution of environmental injustices in South Carolina. *Social Science Quarterly, 229-243*.

Müller, M. M., & Clayton, S. (2013). Introduction to "Environmental Justice". *Social Justice Research, 26*(3), 227-230.

Newton, D. E. (2009). *Environmental Justice: A Reference Handbook: A Reference Handbook*. ABC-CLIO.

Okazaki, S. (2009). Impact of racism on ethnic minority mental health. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 4*(1), 103-107.

Pastor, M., Morello-Frosch, R., & Sadd, J. L. (2005). The air is always cleaner on the other side: Race, space, and ambient air toxics exposures in California. *Journal of Urban Affairs, 27*(2), 127-148.

Scammell, M. K., Senier, L., Darrah-Okike, J., Brown, P., & Santos, S. (2009). Tangible evidence, trust and power: public perceptions of community environmental health studies. *Social Science & Medicine*, 68(1), 143-153.

Taylor, D. (2014). *Toxic communities: Environmental racism, industrial pollution, and residential mobility*. NYU Press.

Appendix A:



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

March 9, 2016

Elizabeth Gonzalez

Dear Elizabeth,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Andrew Jilani, Research Advisor

Appendix B



2015-2016

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Smith College School for Social Work • Northampton, MA**

.....

Title of Study: Toxic Stress: Exploring Mental Health Narratives of Environmental Justice in Richmond, California

Investigator(s):

(Elizabeth Gonzalez, Smith College School for Social Work, xxx-xxx-xxxx)

.....

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study of Environmental Justice and its effects on the residents of Richmond, CA.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you have self-identified as a community member in the surrounding area willing to share how the refinery in your community may have impacted your health.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is to explore the personal stories of residents living in the Richmond, CA area who may have been affected by the presence of the refinery
- This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master’s in social work degree
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:
- Be interviewed and asked to share your story as related to the refinery’s presence in your community
- Asked a series of questions related to mental health, such as stress, anxiety, depression, etc.
- Interviews will be expected to last 45-60 minutes.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- The study has the following risks. First, we will be exploring issues pertaining to health, both physical and mental, which can be a sensitive topic. Second, some of the issues will be related to social injustice, which can also be sensitive and uncomfortable. You will be given a brochure published by Contra Costa Health Services if you feel you are in need of further support.

Benefits of Being in the Study

- The benefits of participation are:
 - Gaining insight on a major issue in the city through the narratives of residents
 - Contribute to growing literature on environmental justice and mental health
- The benefits to social work/society are:
 - Understanding how toxic facilities affect the health of communities of color and low-income communities as told by residents themselves
 - Provide personal insight from those directly affected
 - Highlight areas for social workers to address and be aware of

Confidentiality

- Your participation will be kept confidential. I will code the interview, as well as your identifying information, in order to maintain confidentiality. We will meet in a convenient and safe location—with consideration of your request for confidentiality. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Only I will have access to audio recordings and will not make them public. They will be destroyed or deleted after three years.
- All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent/assent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments/gift

- You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* (up to the date noted below) without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email or phone by April 1st, 2016. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis, dissertation or final report.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Elizabeth Gonzalez at egonzalez@smith.edu or by telephone at _____. If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep. You will also be given a list of referrals and access information if you experience emotional issues related to your participation in this study.

.....

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

.....

[if using audio or video recording, use next section for signatures:]

1. I agree to be [audio or video] taped for this interview:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be taped:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____

Appendix C:

ANY DOOR IS THE RIGHT DOOR

We strive to make it easier for our consumers to find and use all the services they need.

Many people begin their relationship with Contra Costa Behavioral Health because of an immediate problem, such as a drug dependency, or running out of housing options. Regardless of the service that a consumer uses, our staff works with them to identify all of their issues, and customizes a multi-disciplinary care plan tailored to produce lasting, meaningful improvement in the quality of their lives.

Any door is the right door to get help, at any time.

OUR MISSION

The mission of Contra Costa Behavioral Health, in partnership with consumers, families, staff, and community-based agencies, is to provide welcoming, integrated services for mental health, substance abuse, homelessness and other needs that promote wellness, recovery, and resiliency while respecting the complexity and diversity of the people we serve.

OUR VISION

Contra Costa Behavioral Health envisions a system of care that supports independence, hope, and healthy lives by making accessible behavioral health services that are responsive, integrated, compassionate, and respectful.

"We all know that to treat the whole person, we must offer all the services they need, when and where they visit. We have been working hard, together, to identify where we can do more to treat the whole individual, rather than individual illnesses."

—Cynthia Belon, L.C.S.W., Contra Costa Behavioral Health Director



CONTRA COSTA
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
A Division of Contra Costa Health Services

1340 Arnold Drive, Suite 200
Martinez, California 94553
925-957-5201
cchealth.org/bhs

ONE DOOR TO WELLNESS, RECOVERY & RESILIENCY

Mental Health, Alcohol & Other Drugs and Homeless Programs—A Single System of Care!



CONTRA COSTA
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
A Division of Contra Costa Health Services

Appendix C cont.

TREATING THE WHOLE PERSON

Contra Costa Behavioral Health brings together Contra Costa County's mental health, substance abuse and homeless services into a single system of care. This integration allows us to provide flexible, effective treatment for people with complex needs.

We understand that people who come to us for one kind of assistance often need additional help in other areas of their lives. By combining our services, we make it easier for our consumers to get the right help and the services they need.

In this way, Contra Costa Behavioral Health promotes wellness, recovery and resiliency while respecting the individuality and diversity of the people we serve.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Our Mental Health Services program serves Contra Costa residents with mental health needs. We work to instill hope and empower our consumers to manage their symptoms and reclaim their lives and relationships.

Our services for our consumers and their families include prevention and early intervention programs, rehabilitation services, psychotherapy, group services, day treatment services, residential, crisis and inpatient. Mental health services including peer and family support are provided for children, adolescents, adults and older adults.

For more information, please call 925-957-5150 or visit chealth.org/mentalhealth. For services, call the Mental Health Access Line, call 1-888-678-7277.

CONTRA COSTA BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



HOMELESS SERVICES

Thousands of people experience homelessness every night in Contra Costa County, and many others are at risk of losing their housing.

Our integrated system of care for homeless individuals and families includes emergency shelters, transitional housing, advocacy, outreach services to encampments, information and referral services, case management, and permanent supportive housing for adults, youth, and families.

For more information about our programs, call 925-313-7700 or visit chealth.org/homeless. For access to shelter and other services, call 1-800-799-6599 (adult services) or 1-800-610-9400 (youth services).

ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUGS SERVICES

Our Alcohol and Other Drugs program offers a comprehensive approach to providing substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery services for Contra Costa residents.

Our continuum of care includes detoxification, outpatient counseling, residential programs, services for pregnant women and youth, and narcotic replacement therapy programs.

We offer a broad range of community-based programs that are culturally competent and client driven.

For more information, please call 925-335-3330 or visit chealth.org/aod. To access AODS services, call 1-800-846-1652.

Appendix D: Guiding Questions

1. Can you please state your occupation, age, and length of residency in Richmond or surrounding areas?
2. What is your relation to the refinery?
3. Do you live near the Chevron refinery?
 - a. If yes, how long have you lived there?
4. Do you ever find yourself worried about living near the refinery?
5. What are some of the ways you notice the refinery's presence in your daily life?
6. What are some health issues you have that you believe are linked to the refinery's toxic presence? Please do not feel obligated to answer the question
7. What are some of your concerns about what may have caused the illnesses?
8. Have you sought help or support because of these ailments?
9. Have you been present during some of the past explosions?
 - a. If so, can you please recount what the experience was like?
10. What could you see? Smell? Feel?
11. Are you worried about future explosions?
12. Do you feel like daily emissions are a major stressor for you?
13. Would you consider the refinery a positive presence, as well?
 - a. If so, in what ways?
14. Do you feel like your city has your best interest in mind when it comes to decisions regarding the refinery?
15. Are you familiar with the activist or social justice work in the area?
16. In what other ways does the refinery affect your life?

Appendix E: Recruitment Email

Hello,

I am currently a candidate for a Masters in Social Work degree from Smith College School for Social Work. As a life-long resident of Richmond, I wanted to focus my thesis project on an issue that hits close to home. My program's focus is clinical social work; therefore I want to use a mental health focus in observing and deconstructing how Chevron has impacted the mental health of local residents. The title I have chosen is *Toxic Stress: Exploring Mental Health Narratives of Environmental Justice in Richmond, California*, which encapsulates what I hope to accomplish through my research. Using interviews, I would like to explore the experiences of those who feel impacted by the refinery's presence. I have reviewed multiple studies about environmental justice, pollution, place-based hazards, and environmental racism and want to understand, through narratives, how residents see themselves as affected by toxic pollutants emanating from the refinery.

It is my hope to connect with individuals willing to share their experiences that highlight how they feel personally affected by the refinery's presence in the community. I am interested in exploring mental health effects; therefore would like to ask about stress and/or other ways their mental health has been affected. I am interested in creating a more personal picture of how community members construct their stories and share their realities.

This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC) and I have been authorized to conduct interviews.

I would be very grateful for any help you are able to provide. I look forward to hearing from you. Please reply individually if you are interested.

Thank you very much,

Elizabeth Gonzalez
