

TA: Rebeca Martinez

Kayla Suleminian

COVID-19 Personal Reflection

COVID-19, a highly contagious sickness that targets the respiratory system, was an unexpected and uncontrollable hit on our community, country, and world. What we thought was just another common cold, is the cause of hundreds of thousands of deaths. What we thought was an illness that was only deadly and dangerous to the elders, is in fact killing people of all ages. We were told that it is only those who have underlying conditions who are at risk, but turns out that the most fit and the healthiest are lying in hospital beds, fighting for their lives. The truth is, there is so much contradicting information being thrown at us from different news channels and politicians, that nobody knows what to believe or who to trust. So what are we doing in the meanwhile? We are taking all the safety precautions to avoid contracting the virus, and pray that this is over sooner than later.

Being that there is no definite treatment or vaccine for COVID-19, everyone is feeling full of fear and uncertainty. The safety precautions are getting stricter by the week. Everybody is required to wear a mask when out in public, and many even take it a step further by wearing gloves as well. Leaving the house without hand sanitizer is unthought of and no one dares to stand any closer than 6 feet apart from one another. Supermarkets and pharmacies are the only two places my family and I leave the house to go to. These places now only allow a limited number of customers in at a time, and all shopping carts get wiped down after being touched. When I get home from the market, I wipe down every item with disinfectant wipes and throw away all the paper bags, because the department of health warned us that the virus can live on

surfaces for 3 hours and even up to 3 days. Essential items, such as eggs and toilet paper, are hard to get a hold of as many people began to stalk up on these items because of the fear that there will be no access to anything in the coming weeks. Living in such a technologically advanced world, I never would have imagined that people would be fighting over toilet paper and hand sanitizer. I never would have believed that our world would fall into such a horrible state of panic.

On top of all the anxiety and stress over staying healthy and safe during this time, our economy is suffering greatly as well. The majority of the people are dealing with unemployment and closures of businesses. My family is currently undergoing much hardship during this time. My parents own a small jewelry business, which has been closed for over a month now since it is not an essential business. They don't have an online website, so they have not been able to sell anything during this time which is extremely stressful as they still have to pay rent and other bills relating their company's expenses. Additionally, I have temporarily lost my part time job/internship that I had at a dermatologist office, as the doctor is now working remotely from home and is holding off any regular appointments for the time being. It is scary not knowing how much longer this will go on for, because if it continues for another couple months, who knows how we will pay for school and other expenses that were covered by our expected income that we no longer have anymore.

Aside from the economic crisis that the majority of the world is experiencing, I want to talk about the other difficulties my own community is facing. I live in a Jewish community in Los Angeles, and the basis of our community consists of attending synagogue and practicing traditions with family gatherings. With that being said, this time is very confusing for us. During

this past month of quarantine, we celebrated one of the most important holidays for us- passover. On this holiday, we have what's called a "seder", where every family normally celebrates with their extended relatives and many attend synagogue as well. This year was the first year, in my life and in my parents lives, that passover was celebrated with just my parents and siblings at home. And this was the case for all the Jewish families in my community and around the world. My grandparents, for the first time, spent Passover all alone- which was heartbreaking. This passover definitely will be one that I will never forget, and hopefully it will be the last one spent in isolation. Aside from the major holidays, every Friday night it is a custom to have what we call a "shabbat dinner" which is spent with extended family as well. It is difficult and upsetting not to see my extended family every week like we are used to, and shabbat has not felt the same during this pandemic. But, on a positive note, it has led my family and I to truly appreciate the presence of our relatives and has taught us to never take such holiday gatherings for granted ever again.

Another part of my life that I will no longer take for granted is my time spent on UCLA's beautiful campus. Waking up early and rushing to class, was something I once dreaded but now deeply miss. COVID-19 has affected students all across the country, with many unable to have a proper graduation and all of us transitioning to online school. Online school is a hard adjustment, especially when you are trying to focus with your whole family at home. It is doable, but it is not easy and I am very thankful for the wonderful Professors at UCLA who are working hard to make this transition as smooth as possible for the students. We are fortunate enough to be living in a time where we do not have to sacrifice our education for our health and safety, but rather we

are able to make these adjustments and continue our studies while obeying the stay at home orders.

COVID-19 is not the first pandemic our world is experiencing, and it definitely will not be the last. There were several pandemics in the past, but one of the worst was the Spanish Flu that spread in 1918. Another similar spread of disease I would like to relate COVID-19 to is the smallpox epidemic (as well as measles, and other diseases) and its impact on the indigenous population. In class we learned that the indigenous people were decimated by these epidemics. They did not know what it was and how to treat it, and simply tried to cure smallpox with the way they knew how to treat any ordinary sickness. This is very similar to how our medical field is responding to COVID-19, because we do not have a unique way of attacking this virus so we are taking the same precautions that we would take for any ordinary cold or flu. The spread of smallpox affected all aspects of the indigenous populations lives, just like it is affecting all aspects of our lives.

Just as the indigenous people did not see the smallpox coming, Bill Gates was concerned that the world would not be prepared for the next epidemic coming to attack us. I recently watched a ted talk where Bill Gates spoke about how our world is not prepared for the next outbreak and that our government is focusing too much on fighting nuclear war rather than preparing to fight our worst enemy: a deadly unknown virus. With all the tools and technology we have today, our government should have been prepared to make drugs and vaccines that could overcome any virus.

But, unfortunately our government did not prepare and the reality is that our future is unknown for the time being. I personally believe that life will never go back to normal until there

is an FDA approved vaccine and that this whole experience will cause people all across the world to be extra cautious in public places because of the fear that there may be another outbreak one day. I believe that in the future everyone will continue to wear masks when going to an airport or crowded venue, and that hand sanitizer will be just as important to carry on you as your cell phone. I believe that in the future people will not be so quick to hug and kiss one another, and even handshakes may be a norm that we will re-think. This pandemic has made us all afraid of germs and extra aware of our hygiene. We are all developing new habits and new norms that will stick with us even after we overcome this virus.

COVID-19 was also, in many ways, a wake up call for our world. It serves as a reminder that no matter what your ethnicity is, what your religion is, where you live or how much money you have- you are not invincible and this virus does not discriminate. As human beings we should all treat each other equally because we are all on the same team. For the first time in a long time, our world has to work together to fight for the same cause- to save the human race. I believe that in the future, people will be more humble and caring. People will remember this time as a period where our fast paced world was put on a sudden hold. Families are spending quality time together like never before. There are barely any cars on the streets, public parks and beaches are closed, and nature is getting a chance to breathe again without us polluting it. We are starting to appreciate the little things in life that nature has to offer, such as watching the sunset or simply enjoying the warm summer temperatures. During this time of physical distancing, many people are able to work on themselves and are finally able to prioritize their own needs. I personally have found myself doing activities I never had time for in my normal life- such as reading a book for pure enjoyment, painting and even baking. I hope that as we enter the post-COVID-19 stages

of our lives, that we continue to appreciate nature and our loved ones as we do now. I hope that our society never forgets all the hard work of the medical staff across the world during this time, and that our government will do what they can to prepare for the next epidemic so that the future generation will have it easier than we did.