

THE PERSONAL IMPACTS OF COVID-19,
THE ROLE OF RESPECT DURING A PANDEMIC
AND WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

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The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically transformed many aspects of life for everyone around the globe. Life, for the time being, seems as if it were put on pause. Concerts, celebrations, institutional academics, and other ways we have routinely come together in the past have been put on hold indefinitely until we can reach the other side of this global crisis. We are presented with a challenging situation: where we do our best to remain isolated for the safety and well-being of our family, friends, neighbors, and the rest of the globe. If we cannot continue to honor the importance of isolation, sickness and death will continue to ravage the globe. At the moment, life, and what one may define “living” as, has changed. Not only has the COVID-19 pandemic affected life for the time being, but our actions and attitudes now will continue to shape a dramatically changed future for our community, country, and world.

In my own experiences, the COVID-19 pandemic has truly brought to light how much I had previously taken for granted in my normal daily life. At the start of this pandemic, I thought the situation was being overblown. Early March this year, I was frustrated with lockdown orders being issued, events I was once looking forward to being canceled, and my academics switching to online instruction. I had naïvely thought the developing situation around the pandemic was too dramatic. However, this irritation was only a mask to cover my fear of what my life may need to become. I was anxious about missing out on one of my final quarters in my undergraduate studies. I was fearful I might not have a job, wondering how I would continue living without a source of income. However, most importantly to me, I was afraid of losing physical closeness with friends and family. As the pandemic continued to worsen, and my self-quarantining began, the situation became real for me. I realized how severe the effects of COVID-19 were to the world. Through this, however, I arrived at an appreciation for all of the ordinary aspects of my

life I previously overlooked. I acknowledged how I could simply go out to public places with people I love without being concerned for my health and well being. Remaining isolated gave me a new perspective on my life and I began appreciating the freedom I normally have. While my outlook on the COVID-19 pandemic was originally shrouded with disdain and irritation, the pandemic has affected me by giving me a new, appreciative outlook on my life. I am grateful for the smallest aspects of my life I previously disregarded, and I am sure I will carry this mindset with me for the rest of my life once we can reach the other side of this pandemic.

Despite my original worry of losing my job due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I, and everyone in my household, are all luckily still able to work during this time. I am employed at a restaurant, and in our transition to solely take out and delivery orders I remained scheduled to work. I am not only thankful to still be making money during this time, but going to work serves as a great way to break up the monotony of instruction on Zoom, pre-recorded lectures, and the mental agony of self-isolation. Additionally, both my mother and father are still able to work from home. We are certainly some of the lucky few to be in this position, but it still came with many hardships. My parents are older, and not that comfortable with technology, and the shift to working online has certainly impacted them. My mother works as a high school English teacher and having to transform her classroom from in-person to behind a computer screen in one week overloaded her with stress and defeat. Instructing online, getting her classes set up, and tackling new requirements from her administration concerning this transition has put a tremendous amount of demand on what she has done normally for over twenty years. Furthermore, my father having to set up his entire office space in our house while also having trouble navigating technology has brought similar feelings of frustration and even worthlessness. As the months

continue to pass and my household becomes more comfortable with working from home, things have certainly gotten easier. However, the beginning of the pandemic certainly impacted our lives. Though we all appreciate the fortunate position we are in, the transition in doing so was not simple.

The greatest struggles and anxieties for myself revolve around making sure my family remains healthy. When I clock into the restaurant I work for takeout and delivery shifts, I interact with hundreds of people a day. Despite the pandemic, our restaurant remains incredibly busy, bringing in a large number of customers and guests on a daily basis. Though some orders are paid for in advance to avoid any person to person contact, plenty of people continue to walk into the store, or still need assistance in one way or another. In addition to that, we still offer takeout orders through third-party services where drivers come in and pick up the orders for guests. I worry about the risk this presents me and my family. Our customers and third-party workers also probably interact with countless people throughout the day. Who knows whether or not any of these people have interacted with someone suffering from COVID-19. Thankfully, the management at my workplace is doing everything within their power to ensure our safety, trying to eliminate as many people from entering the restaurant as possible. Nevertheless, I still fear that interacting with so many people even with masks and gloves on still will not be enough to prevent myself or any of my coworkers from contracting COVID-19. Even off the clock, I still distance myself a great deal from my family because I am unsure whether or not I've been exposed to the virus from being at work. Upon reflection, I would not consider myself an "essential worker," however, working still makes me uncomfortable and concerned for my safety and the safety of those in my household.

Since most of my thoughts regarding the COVID-19 pandemic revolve around working and interacting with a great number of people still, work has also brought me to my biggest reflection upon the situation. I've realized just how important each individual person's actions have on the lives of the others in our communities, and how it can affect the future in a post-COVID-19 world. Respect is one of the most important things we can give to one another during the COVID-19 pandemic. I work in a more affluent area of Los Angeles, in the beach cities of the South Bay. Here, it seems as though for a large part of the community, the severity surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has been significantly downplayed. On my drive to work, I see groups outside ignoring stay at home social distancing recommendations. Additionally, in conversations with guests at the restaurant, the majority feel that the situation is over and that life ought to return back to normal. I hear complaints daily about our limited staff and service, pushing our restaurant to open dine-in seating like usual. Furthermore, as the months continue, customers have come in without masks or gloves and mocking the situation surrounding the pandemic. I understand the frustration and the desire to return to normalcy as soon as possible, I too felt the stay at home orders were a bit dramatic at the start of the pandemic. However, in interacting with others during this time, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of respect. For myself, I am constantly worried I might one-day contract COVID-19 from my interactions work, and expose my two high-risk parents to this deadly disease. Though to one individual the COVID-19 pandemic might not be drastically serious in their eyes, for another it might be a real concern. I've heard the argument that wearing a mask "limits one's freedom of speech" and whatnot, but for me, it is a sign of respect for the other person, as you do not know the situation they are in. Thankfully, I am in a comfortable position, being able to work while others in my

household can do the same, but the dangers the COVID-19 pandemic presents are very real in my eyes. The actions one person takes towards another can have serious impacts on the lives of other people in their community, so having that respect for the other person is crucial. Not every guest I interact with downplays the threat of the virus. In fact, most people are extremely grateful and courteous, thanking our staff for continuing to work during the pandemic. Nonetheless, maintaining respect for others in your community during these troubling times remains dramatically important.

If we cannot continue to give consideration towards one another in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, I fear that the history we are learning about widespread illness and disease will continue to play out. To prevent the spread of COVID-19 and the possibility of an even higher death rate for the virus, each individual must respect the position they play during the pandemic. Teofilo Ruiz's lectures on Spanish conquest in the New World mention how disastrous sickness was on the indigenous population of the Caribbean. Diseases such as smallpox, measles, or yellow fever decimated native populations and facilitated the Castilian's harsh conquest of the area. Greater than violence, Ruiz mentions, "Sickness killed more people than [the Spanish] ever would."¹ Spanish colonization paid little regard for the lives and well-being of the indigenous population, who suffered as a result. The impact disease had on the lives of people from the past went both ways too, however, as syphilis ravaged Europe and became an endemic sickness that would last until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.² Our actions now carry significant weight for the future. If the severity of COVID-19 continues to be downplayed it can create a future where individuals die in greater numbers and families continue

¹ Teofilo R. Ruiz, Class Lecture, Mon 04/27/2020 (Original Date: 04/30/2018)

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to suffer. Only through respect and continued distancing can we shape a future with fewer casualties. Disease and sickness have made a devastating, lasting impact on the lives of indigenous populations of North America, and if we cannot respect the impact the COVID-19 pandemic could have globally, the future might become more deadly as a result.

Despite my personal struggles regarding the pandemic, I remain optimistic about the future. I've come to understand that I am not alone in feeling thankful for small things in life I've taken for granted in the past. Moving forward from this pandemic, I speculate the world will be a brighter place. Individuals may come out of this situation with a new-found appreciation for the world, and those around them. I doubt daily life will return to what it once was, but people around the globe will be more loving and thankful for life more than ever before. The world has and will continue to change from facing the COVID-19 pandemic. Institutions and workplaces might become more inclined to transition more of their services online to avoid the spread of any future diseases, and leaving one's household without a face mask might not be a reality for another year. Certainly, the pandemic is changing the world and our views of it. This experience has certainly transformed my outlook on aspects of my own life. I remain optimistic regarding the nature of the world after this situation. However, we can only hope to achieve such a future if we continue to respect the severity of this disease and each other in hopes of more of us coming together after being isolated.