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The Aftermath for Psychology Students: Questionnaire Administered to SJSU Alumni

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Lluvia Gonzalez

Major:
Psychology

Mentor: **Dr. Valerie Carr**

*The Aftermath for Psychology
Students: Questionnaire
Administered to SJSU Alumni*

Biography

Lluvia is a fourth year, going on to fifth year, and a proud psychology student! In her youth, she always pondered why people are the way they are which lead to a natural curiosity in investigating human behavior. My past research involves investigating where SJSU psychology students go after their undergraduate studies, and how caffeine effects memory consolidation. We, as a species, are intrigued by what we do not know, and Lluvia is most passionate about what else we can learn about the functions of the brain. In the fall of 2018, she plans to apply to graduate schools to specialize in the neuroscience.

The Aftermath for Psychology Students: Questionnaire Administered to SJSU Alumni

Abstract

Psychology is an interesting field that attempts to understand human behavior, and many pursue it to help others (Haselhuhn & Clopton, 2008). This field of study leads to many opportunities which is an advantage of the field but can also be a disadvantage. If psychology students want to pursue a graduate degree, they need to consider which subfield they will specialize in. There are a variety of sub-disciplines in the psychology field: clinical, counseling, industrial organization, experimental/research, neuroscience, cognition, forensic, etc. (Feist, 2006). The disadvantage is that if students do not know what to specialize in, it might feel daunting to explore all the options. There is also a disadvantage for students who do not want to pursue a graduate degree; Pinkus and Korn (1973) argued that there is no clear path for students with a bachelor's in psychology. Due to this mystery in psychology students' career opportunities, the purpose of this research is to investigate San Jose State University psychology alumni's current occupations, salaries, and how graduate school affected their incomes. This analysis and interpretation of archival data will be used to convey different career opportunities in psychology to students at San Jose State University (SJSU). This analysis has the potential to help other students have a broader understanding of the paths they may choose in this field.

There are countless questions psychology students will need to know to ask while pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology. Do you want a PhD or PsyD? Do you want a Masters or PhD? Are you research oriented or focused on clinical work? What population do you want to work with: infants, toddlers, adolescent, adults, or older persons? After asking yourself these questions, the next steps are to research careers of interest, interview a person in that position, and decide to focus on achieving that career goal. Even though there are numerous opportunities in the psychology field, some are skeptical of psychology students finding a job related to their field (Borden & Rajecki, 2000; Haselhuhn &

Clopton, 2008). As a student, I went through this whole process with environmental studies, clinical psychology, and currently, behavioral neuroscience. These steps might feel overwhelming, but they are essential for career exploration and satisfaction.

Korn and Nodine (1975) investigated why psychology students do not know more about what happens after graduation, and my curiosity led me to ask the same question: Where are psychology students today? The respondents to the questionnaire this research is based on are BS/BA psychology graduates or graduates from one of the master's degree programs at (SJSU): M.A. Research and Experimental Psychology, M.S. Industrial and Organization, and M.S. Clinical Psychology. Although SJSU does not offer a PhD or PsyD program, some of the respondents completed their degrees at SJSU and went on to pursue their PhD/PsyD at other institutions. Without the generosity of the psychology department, this analysis would not be possible. They were responsible for creating the questionnaire and administering it to SJSU alumni, while I received their CSV file and a copy of their questionnaire.

Method

In 2016, the Psychology Department at SJSU sent out questionnaires to over 300 alumni. A copy of The Psychology Alumni Survey and the CSV file of the responses was provided by request. The data set was not analyzed prior to investigation. There were a total of 37 questions and only selected questions were analyzed for this study. While cleaning the data, reasons for eliminating responses included failure to complete the online survey and multiple entries for one participant. After revision, 319 responses were used for this study. Jupyter Notebook with Python was used to illustrate visual demographics, statistical means, and regression analysis. Figure 1 demonstrates that the population consisted of the majority being female, while Figure 3 illustrates that White is the majority ethnic demographic, with Asian and Hispanic or Latino following. In Figure 2, the average age is approximately 40 years old with a standard deviation of 16.55; the minimum age was 22, and the maximum was 84. This signifies that there was great diversity among psychology alumni who graduated that year and those who retired.

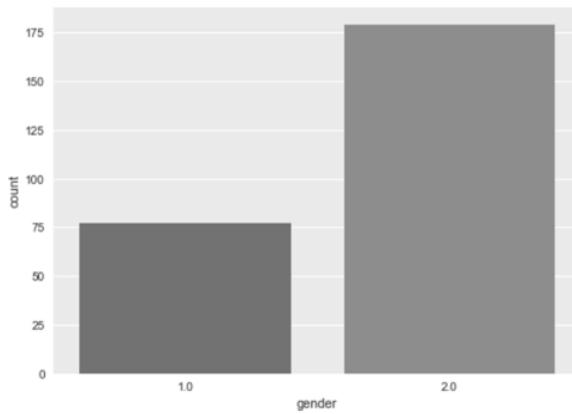


Figure 1: Gender: Male(1), Female(2)

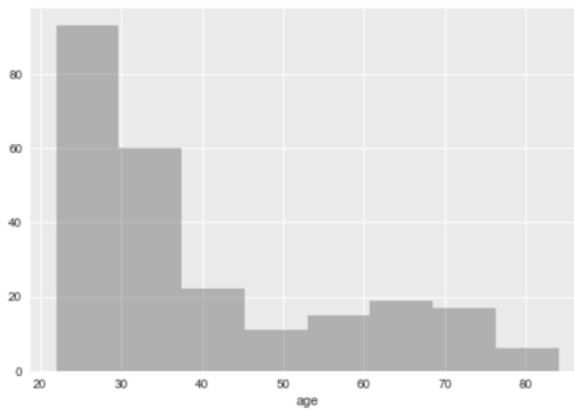


Figure 2: Age: mean 39.79

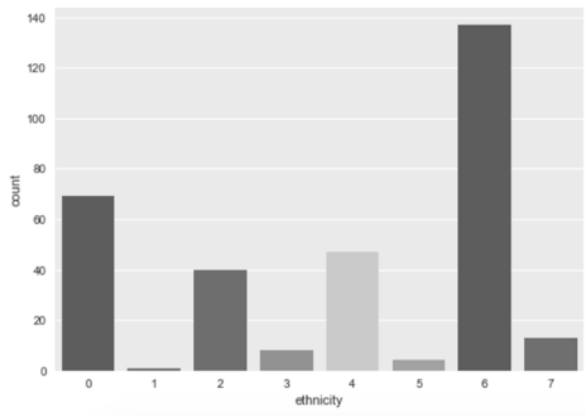


Figure 3: Ethnicity: Did not answer question (0), American Indian or Alaskan Native (1), Asian (2), Black or African American (3), Hispanic or Latino (4), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (5), White (6), Mix Ethnicity (7)

Results

From the 37 questions, the following were of interest for this study:

- 1) How many years after you finished college did you start your graduate or professional education?
- 2) How well do you feel the SJSU psychology department prepared you for your graduate or professional education?
- 3) What is your annual salary in U.S. dollars?
- 4) What is your current occupation?

The analysis revealed that students took about a two year break on average before they started their graduate or professional education. Figure 5 illustrates that the majority of psychology students felt that the psychology department at SJSU “more than adequately” prepared them for their graduate or professional education. As shown in Figure 6, the average

yearly income was about \$87,000. The survey allowed participants to enter what they did for a living, and based on the responses they were placed in one of nine broader categories: Law, Human Services, Administration, Business and Industry, Education, Human Resources, Research, Non-employed, and Retired. There is a greater placement rate in Human Services which suggests that Ware and Meyer’s (1981) earlier findings were valid.

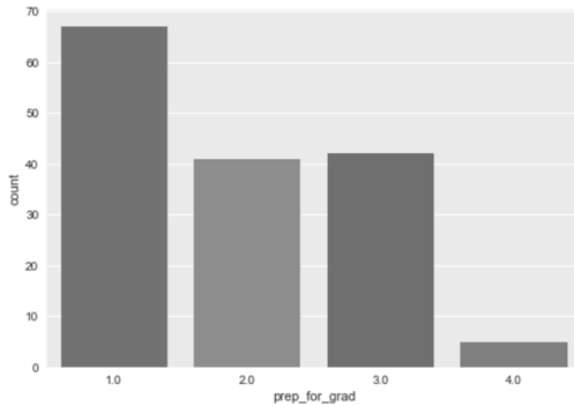


Figure 4: How well do you feel the SJSU Psychology Department prepared you for your graduate or professional education? Very well (1), More than adequately (2), Adequately (3), Less than adequately (4)

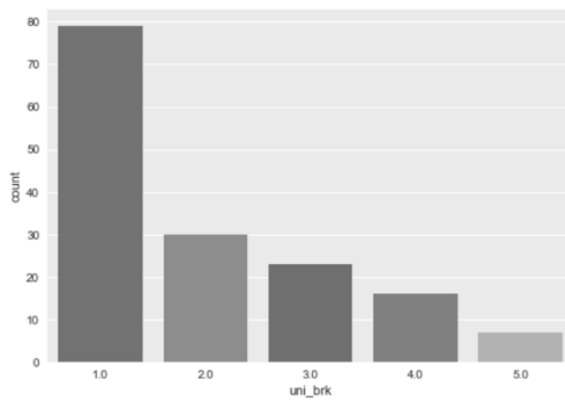


Figure 5: How many years after you finished college

did you start your graduate or professional education?
 Less than 1 year (1), 1 to 2 years (2), 3 to 5 years (3),
 6 to 10 years (4), More than 10 years (5)

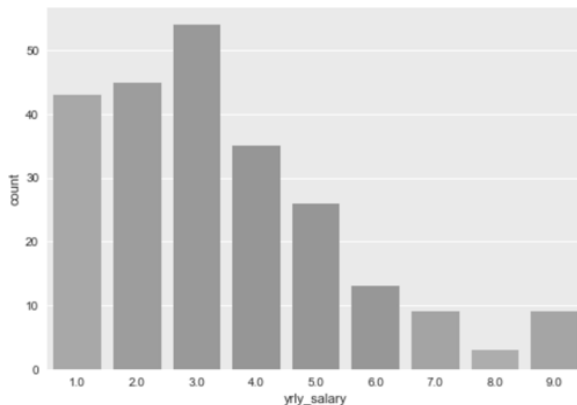


Figure 6: What is your annual salary in U.S. dollars?
 0 – 25000 (1), 25,001 - 50,000 (2), 50,001 - 75,000 (3),
 75,001 - 100,000 (4), 100,001 - 125,000 (5),
 125,001 - 150,000 (6), 150,001 - 175,000 (7),
 175,001 - 200,000 (8), 200,001+ (9)

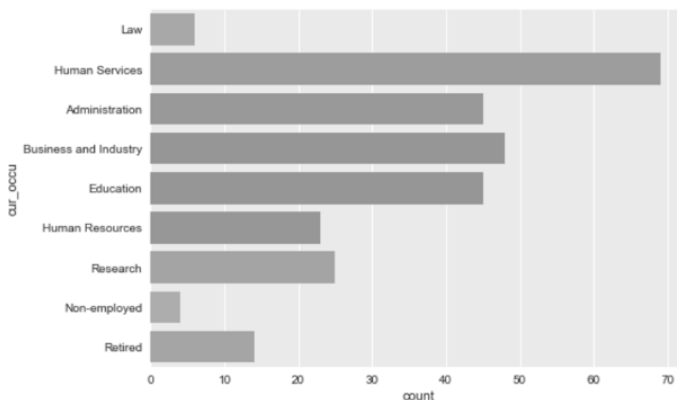
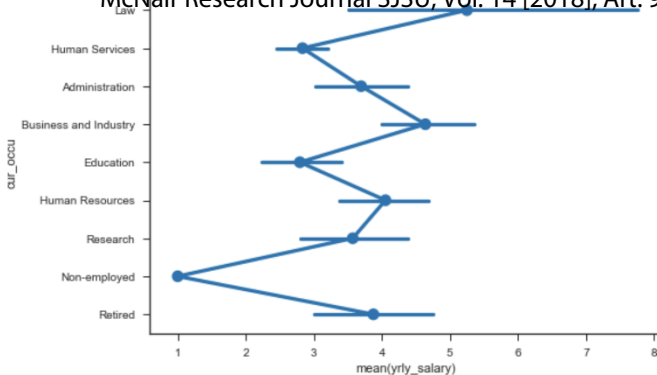


Figure 7: What is your current occupation? Law, Human Services, Administration, Business and Industry, Education, Human Resources, Research, Not Employed, Retired

Data visualization was achieved through Seaborn library. A pointplot was created to illustrate Figure 8 and Figure 9 describing the



relationship between type of employment and yearly salary, and an Implot was created to illustrate Figure 10 displaying a positive linear regression. Implot aids the visual regressions of yearly income and the type of degree students pursue. The majority of the participants earned more than a bachelor’s degree, which implies that they either pursued a master’s or PhD. Between earning a Bachelor of Arts versus in Science, most chose to do a Bachelor of Arts. One linear regression suggests that yearly salary is higher for those who earned a Bachelor of Arts versus a Bachelor of Science degree. As assumed, those who pursued graduate degrees earned higher salaries.

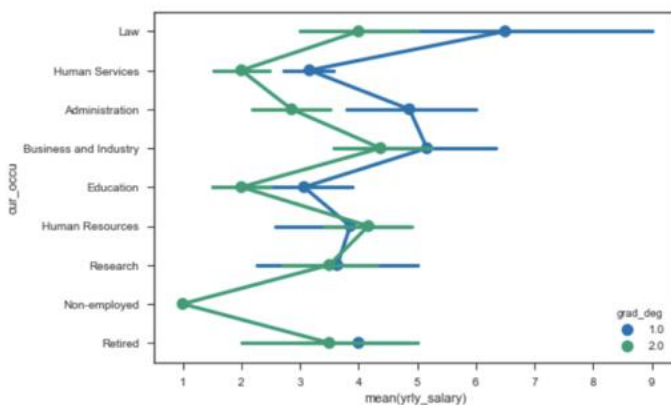


Figure 8: Visualization of current occupation and income on a pointplot: Yes, they went to graduate school (1/blue) and No, they did not attend graduate school (2/green)

Figure 9: Visualization of current occupation and income on a pointplot: the average of

alumni with graduate school and those with only a Bachelor's Degree

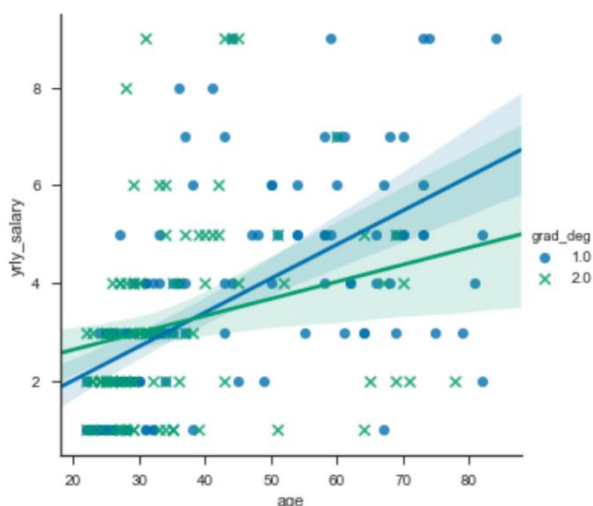


Figure 10: Visualization of a linear regression of graduate degree (yes/no) and income on an Implot: Yes, they attended graduate school (1) or No, they did not attend graduate school (2)

Limitations

This study analyzed data already collected from the psychology department in an attempt to understand what SJSU psychology students pursue after graduation. Due to having one source of data retrieval, this is not generalizable to the whole population of psychology graduates. Future studies should collect surveys from a variety of institutions. Additionally, the distribution of electronic surveys increases extraneous factors that participants might have encountered, including time of day they completed the survey or multi-tasking while completing the survey. There was no further analysis of students in the master's degree programs in regard to which area was the most impacted: Clinical, Experimental, and Industrial Organization. Future investigation on trends in graduate studies could be insightful. Longitudinal study or a cross-sectional study might aid research findings in this area so that a survey can be taken every year, from one year after graduation to the year they have retired. Future research in this

field is essential and insightful for the many who pursue a degree in psychology.

Conclusion

The research findings support past research: psychology students primarily pursue careers in human services, pursuing more education will increase yearly salary, and more females are in the professions involving psychology. Also, students who studied psychology at San Jose State University felt that it prepared them for their future endeavors in education. The analysis of this data can be used to compare other university programs in regards to the trends in occupation and demographics. Due to this data being a cross-sectional study, future studies should consider tracking graduates on a two-year basis as a longitudinal study. With enough research in this field, university faculty advisors will be able to guide students and suggest routes according to their interests and trends in this field. This in turn may make the process of exploring career routes and professional education endeavors in psychology more efficient.

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