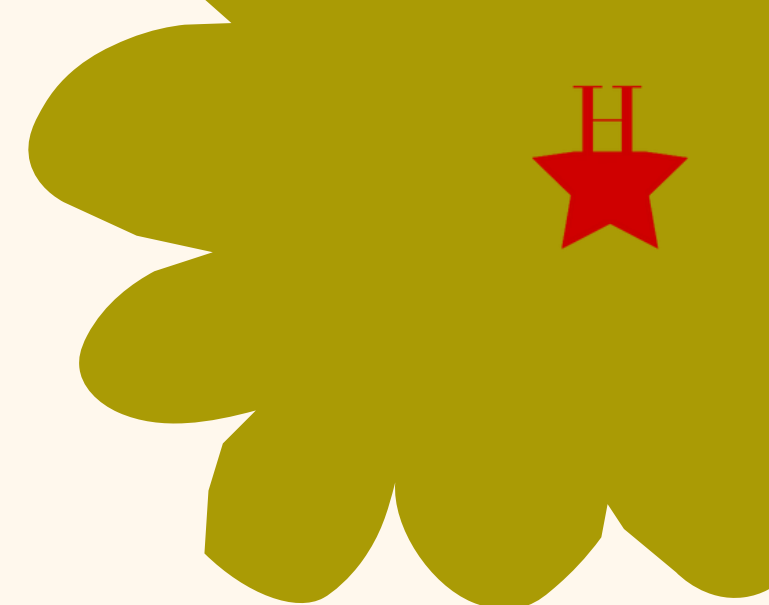December 4, 2024
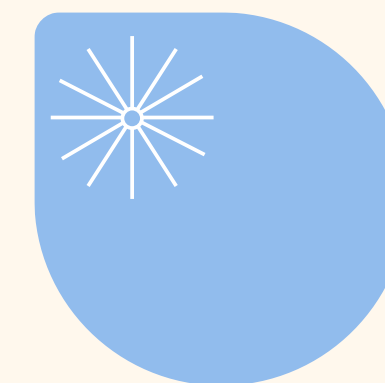
SOCIAL ACTION PROJECT

Loneliness Impact On Social Media Use and Suicide Risk Among SGM Youth

Anjali Vijan

Policy Tracks: Education, Grassroots Activism and Organizing, Human Rights

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The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to practice leadership through action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for **Women's Leadership's** website at http://iwl.rutgers.edu.

Project Description

- Explore whether SM experiences moderate the relationship between loneliness and SI among a national sample SGM adolescents.
- Explore whether loneliness have a reciprocal relationship with positive and negative SM experiences.
- Explore whether loneliness is correlated with the likelihood of suicidal ideation
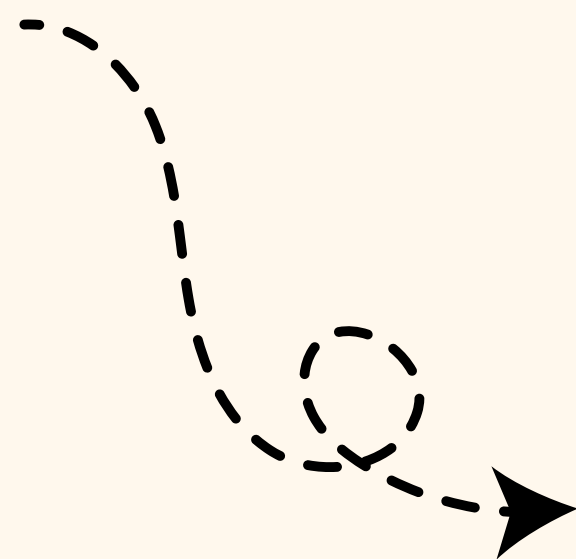
Goal Statement

This study aims to enhance our understanding of loneliness and its impact on mental health among SGM youth in the SM era. While it is well-documented that SGM youth use SM more frequently and face mental health disparities compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers, this research will examine the type of experience that youth had to provide an in-depth picture and potentially inform intervention of loneliness.

Why do SGM youth face higher rates of suicide?

What does SGM stand for?

SGM stands for sexual and gender minority, which refers to individuals who identify as non-heterosexual (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual) and/or do not identify with their assigned sex at birth (e.g., transgender or gender non-binary).
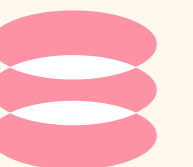
Minority Stress Theory

Discrimination

Prejudice

Unfair laws

Bullying

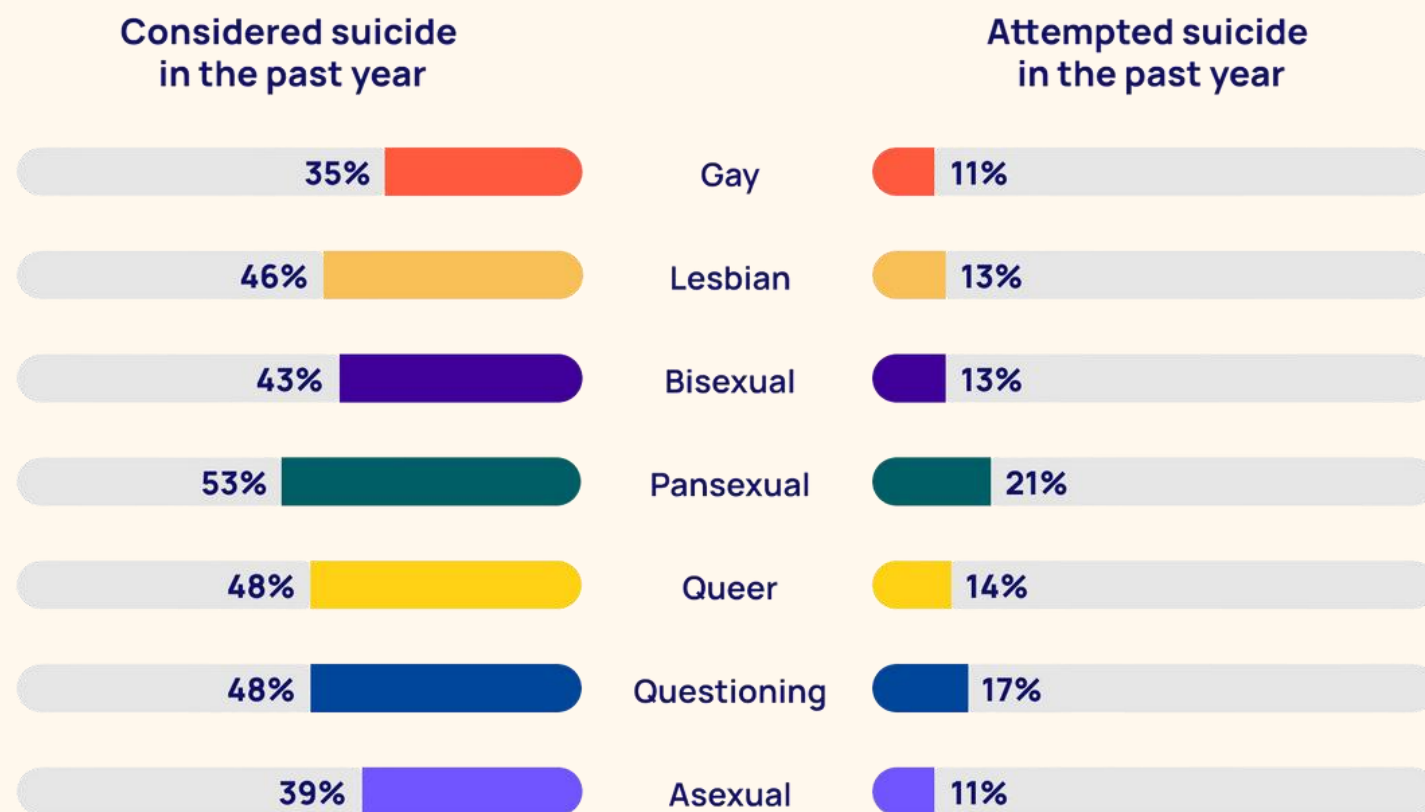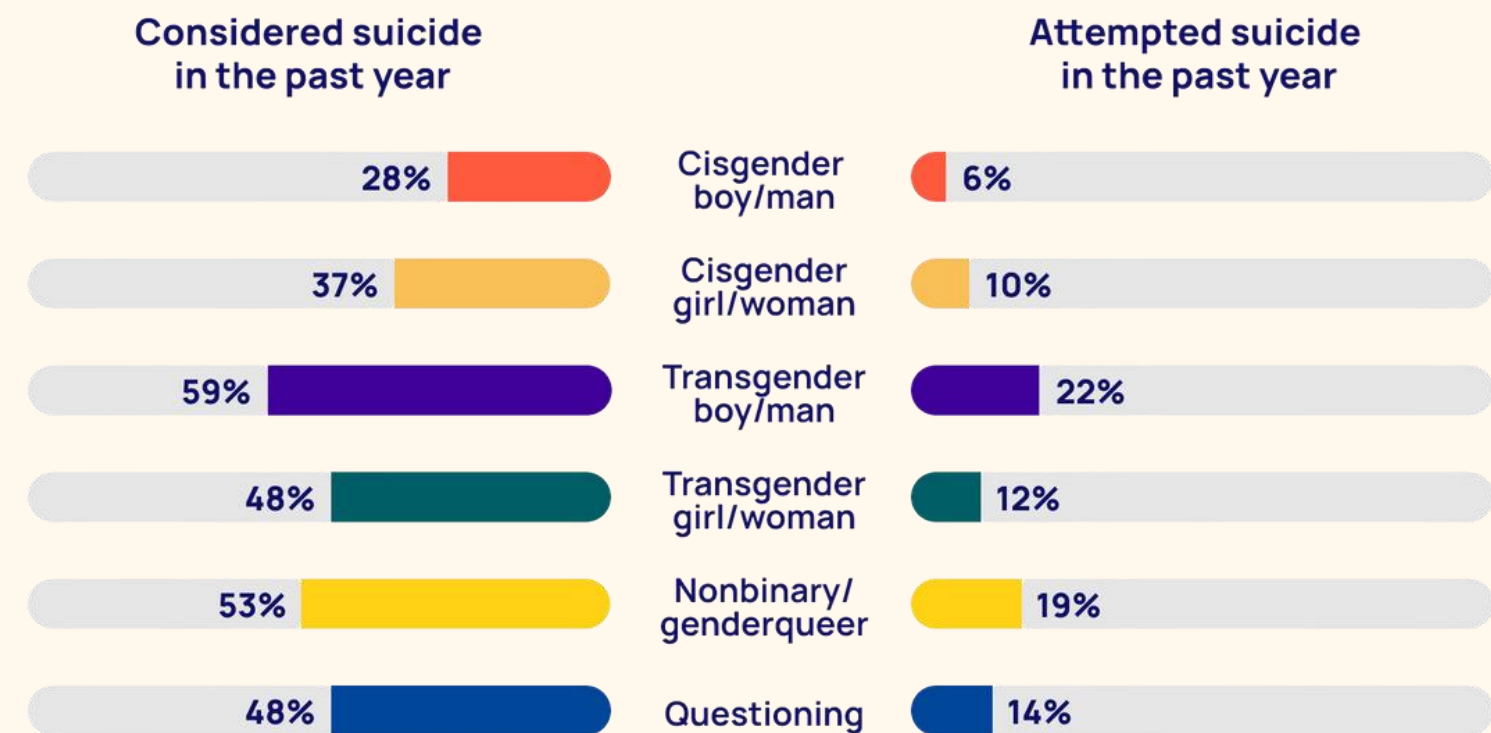(Busby et al., 2020; Gamarel et al., 2014; Suen et al., 2020)

Feelings of Loneliness Can Heighten Risk For Suicide

Loneliness among children and adolescents increases the risk of depression and anxiety, which is a robust predictor of SI and suicidal behaviors.

Rates of considered and attempted suicide among LGBTQ youth by sexual orientation

	Considered suicide in the past year	Attempted suicide in the past year
Gay	35%	11%
Lesbian	46%	13%
Bisexual	43%	13%
Pansexual	53%	21%
Queer	48%	14%
Questioning	48%	17%
Asexual	39%	11%

Rates of considered and attempted suicide among LGBTQ youth by gender identity

	Considered suicide in the past year	Attempted suicide in the past year
Cisgender boy/man	28%	6%
Cisgender girl/woman	37%	10%
Transgender boy/man	59%	22%
Transgender girl/woman	48%	12%
Nonbinary/genderqueer	53%	19%
Questioning	48%	14%

(The Trevor Project, 2022; CDC, 2023; Office of the Surgeon General, 2023)

Social Media Impacts on SGM Youth

Positive Experiences

- Expressing identities
- Facilitating conversation
- Educating others
- Forming genuine connections

Can protect SGM adolescents against loneliness and depression, especially for those who feel unsafe to share their gender identity or sexual orientation in real-world settings.

Negative Experiences

- Stigmatization
- Rejection
- Cyberbullying
- Spread of misinformation

Can lead to depression and low self-esteem, and can be positively related to loneliness which can elevate the risk of SI.

(Escobar-Viera et al., 2018, Escobar-Viera et al., 2020, Chan, 2023, Tropiano, 2014)

Teen Social Media Experiences (TSME) Study

Purpose: To learn more about experiences that teens may have on SM, and how often teens have positive and negative experiences on social media and how this may affect mental health.

Eligibility:

14-17 years old, fluent in English, use social media at least three times a week, take 1 survey

Using a subgroup of the data!

The study is completed!

Measures Used: Demographics, Self-Injurious Thoughts and Behaviors – Revised (SITB-R), Social Media Use (SMU), Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (CIT), Social Media Behaviors and Experiences (SMBE)

Results

Loneliness is associated with a **greater likelihood of SI** and more **negative social media experiences** among SGM teens when controlling social media use time.

Negative social media experiences **were associated** with loneliness.

There was **no significant** association between loneliness and positive SM experiences, **nor an interaction** between loneliness and SM experiences (positive or negative) on SI.

ABCT Conference

## LONELINESS IMPACTS SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCES AND SUICIDE RISK AMONG SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITY YOUTHS

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Rutgers University-New Brunswick[1], Academy of Allied Health and Sciences[2], University of Pittsburgh[3], Harvard University[4], Brown University[5]

INTRODUCTION

- Sexual and gender minority (SGM) teens often report more loneliness and suicidal ideation (SI) compared to their cis-gender, heterosexual peers.
- Many SGM teens seek online support through social media (SM), but it's unclear how loneliness affects their experiences. Limited research highlights whether positive SM experiences protect teens against the impact of loneliness on SI.

STUDY AIMS AND HYPOTHESIS

Loneliness → Positive SM Exp

Loneliness → Suicidal Ideation
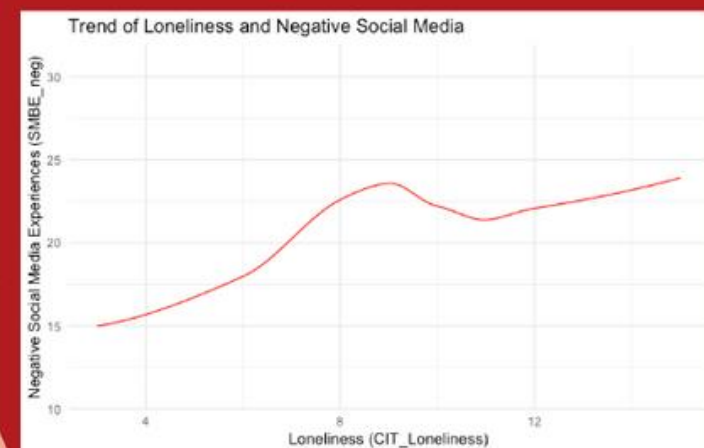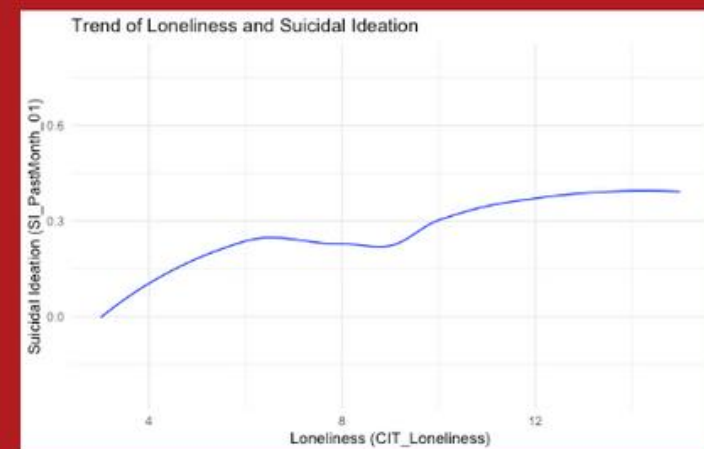
Loneliness → Negative SM Exp
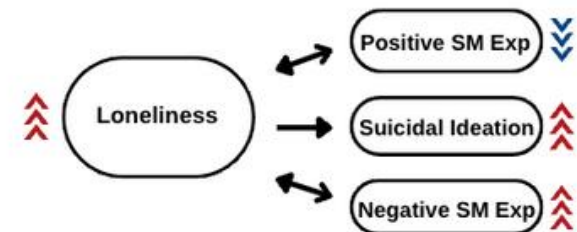
METHODS

219 SGM youths (79% sexual minority, 68% gender minority) responded to the following measures:
- Demographics
- Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (CIT)
- Self-Injurious Thoughts and Behaviors Interview – Revised (SITB-R)
- Social Media Behaviors and Experiences (SMBE)
- Social Media Use (SMU)

Logistical and linear regression models were used to test the main effect of loneliness on suicidal ideation and social media experiences, respectively, and the interactive effects of loneliness and social media experiences on SI.

Loneliness is associated with a greater likelihood of suicidal ideation (B = 0.25, p < .001) and more negative social media experiences (B = 1.04, p < .001) among sexual and gender minority youth.

Trend of Loneliness and Suicidal Ideation

Trend of Loneliness and Negative Social Media

RESULTS

- Negative social media experiences were associated with loneliness (B = 0.21, p < .001).
- There was no significant association between loneliness and positive SM experiences, nor an interaction between loneliness and SM experiences (positive or negative) on SI.

DISCUSSION

- Researchers and clinicians should design and implement interventions for loneliness tailored to SGM youths and foster a sense of belonging and connections to improve their well-being.
- Further research is needed to investigate the specific positive and negative social media experiences.

Check out thehamiltonlab.org for our mental health resources!

Leveraging community engagement to amplify and affirm SGM voices: Adapting and tailoring research tools and CBT-based clinical interventions to improve health equity (Symposium 130)

Bridging Generational Perspectives in Sexual and Gender Minority Mental Health Psychology and Practice (Panel Discussion 7)

Brochure

MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCES AMONG LGBTQ+ YOUTH

LEARN THE FACTS!

92% of youth reported being **active** on social media.

LGBTQ+ youth spend **more time** on social media than their peers.

LGBTQ youth reported **lower** rates of attempting suicide when they felt more **supported** by their friends and family.

LGBTQ youth who live in a community that is **accepting** reported **lower** rates of attempting suicide.

The Trevor Project, 2022 National Survey; McInroy et al., 2019;

RESOURCES

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Text or Call **988**
chat.988lifeline.org

Crisis Text Line

Text **HOME** to 741741

Trans Lifeline

Call 877-565-8860

The Trevor Project

Text **START** to 678678
Call 866-488-7386

Lgbt National Help Center

Hotline
888-843-4564
Youth Talkline
800-246-7743
Coming Out Support Hotline
888-688-5428

Contact: anjali.vijan@rutgers.edu

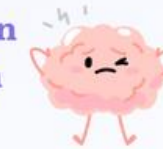### Loneliness

Rejection · Lack of Acceptance · Bullying · Discrimination · Stigma

Suicide Risk Can Heighten From Loneliness

- 58% of LGBTQ youth reported experiencing symptoms of depression
- 73% of LGBTQ youth reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety
- 45% of LGBTQ youth considered suicide
- 14% attempted suicide—rates six times higher than their heterosexual peers

How Can Social Media Effect This?

The Trevor Project, 2022 National Survey

Using Social Media The Right Way is Important!

Negative online experiences can worsen loneliness and raise the risk of suicide. Some key **experiences** to watch for include:

- Cyberbullying
- Body Image
- Social Comparison
- Sleep Disruption

BUT, Social Media Isn't Always Bad!

Social media can also create a **sense of belonging** and form **social connectedness**:

- Facilitating Conversation
- Forming Genuine Connections
- Educating Others
- Sharing Personal Experiences
- Support
- Enjoying Relatable Memes and Videos

Luby et al., 2019; Escobar-Viera et al., 2018; Chan, 2023
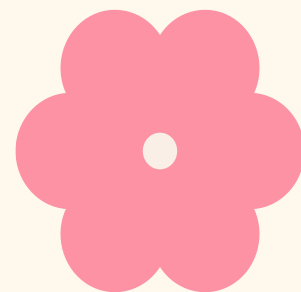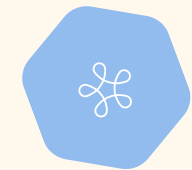
What Does All Of This Mean?

PRIDE!

There is **limited research** on how social media experiences, especially **positive**, shape the relationship between loneliness and suicide.

However, **promoting** positive social media use among the LGBTQ+ community can **reduce** loneliness and rates of suicide.
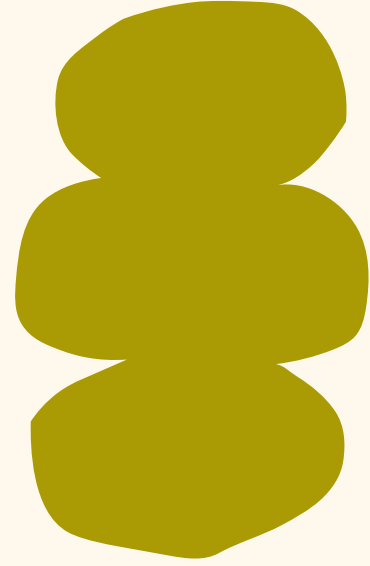
Connections and Contacts

Lessons Learned

Future Impacts

The study highlights the need for awareness, safe online spaces, and tailored support for SGM youth, promoting both emotional well-being and positive social media engagement.
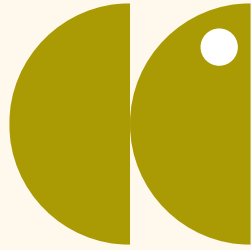
Further research is needed to investigate the specific positive and negative social media experiences.

Researchers and clinicians should design and implement interventions for loneliness tailored to SGM youths and foster a sense of belonging and connections to improve their well-being.
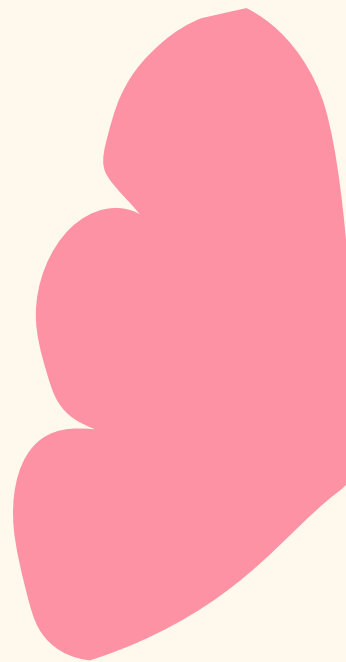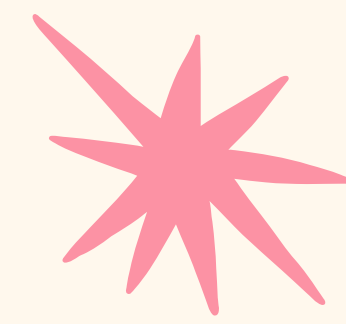
Acknowledgments

Dr. Jessica Hamilton

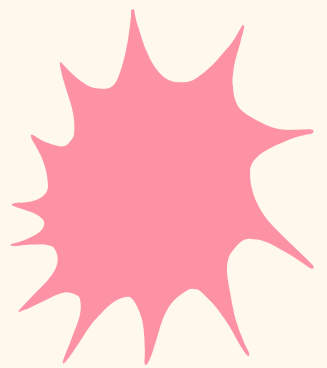Aijia Yao

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Professor Jackson-Brewer

Institute for Women's Leadership

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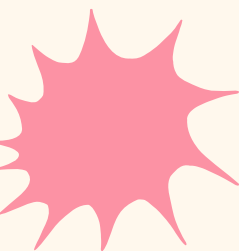
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