

SOCIOLOGY 2014

SENIOR THESIS WRITERS

THE MISSING 700,000:
EXPLAINING BOLSA FAMILIA'S UNDER-COVERAGE FROM A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE



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ABSTRACT

In October 2013, the Brazilian conditional cash transfer program, Bolsa Familia turned ten years old. At the commemoration ceremony, President Dilma Rousseff revealed recent data that claimed 700,000 families (approximately 2.5 million people) are still missing from the program. In an effort to find those people, the Rousseff administration launched a new plan to find these families, investing R\$4 billion (USD \$1.7 billion) in the program. But with all of the noted success in targeting of the program and the impact it has had over a decade, many are wondering why still so many are missing? Little information was provided as to where these families lived and why they are missing. My thesis seeks to provide an explanation for why these families are missing by using sociological arguments. I argue that it is lower income families' scatter across large urban areas like Rio de Janeiro that are making up the program's missing. In these areas, low income families who qualify are choosing not to enroll for benefits out of fear of being stigmatized. My study reveals findings that offer explanations at the community level for why some families are choosing not to enroll.

LA MEJOR HERENCIA:
MEXICAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF MOBILITY AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE U.S.



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ABSTRACT

Mexican immigrants generally arrive to the U.S. with positive perceptions of opportunity and a strong belief in upward mobility (Hill and Torres 2010). However, after spending time in the U.S., they are often exposed to a context of limited opportunities, which may lead them to become more critical of the feasibility of mobility for themselves and for their children (Peske and Haycock 2006, Waters and Eschbach 1995, Zhou 1997). Yet, Mexican immigrants that do have upwardly mobile children find themselves in situations that may confirm their initial beliefs about the possibility of mobility. My study seeks to understand how this group makes sense of mobility, by asking: How do Mexican immigrant parents with upwardly mobile children perceive opportunity and mobility in the U.S.? Using semi-structured interviews with 35 parents of college undergraduates and graduates of 4-year universities, I find that parents conceptualize mobility as intergenerational and emphasize a range of factors—both individualist and structuralist—in explaining mobility. My findings demonstrate that the way parents frame mobility is related to their own lived experiences—specifically, their experiences in the labor market and, more importantly, their exposure to other college-educated individuals. My findings thus extend existing theories on perceptions of mobility, by painting a more holistic understanding of the forces that shape perceptions and complicating current understandings of the factors that help create a Mexican immigrant consciousness.

HYBRID IDENTITY IN GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICT:
A STUDY OF SECOND-GENERATION IRANIAN-AMERICAN ASSIMILATION



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ABSTRACT

How do second-generation Iranian-Americans navigate and project their dual identity in the context of geopolitical tension? Past research in the United States has found that second-generation immigrants, specifically World War II-era German-Americans and post-9/11 people from the Middle East, respond to discrimination following geopolitical tension. Second-generation Iranian-Americans offer a good case to test these findings in a post-9/11 context because 1) of the group's unique demographic standing in the United States and 2) their phenotypical profile is less immediately categorizable than other Middle Eastern groups, though their Middle Eastern descent can open them up to discrimination. How, then, do they respond to the post-9/11 context? In order to answer this question, I conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with second-generation Iranian-Americans in northern Florida and southern California. I targeted individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 since geopolitical tensions emerged at a time critical to their identity formation. I also engaged in ethnographic research by observing participation in formal associations and daily domestic life.

ROADBLOCKS TO EQUALITY:
RECONCILING GENDER ROLES IN SOUTH KOREA'S PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES



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ABSTRACT

The history of South Korea is as tumultuous as the jagged Taebaek mountain range that stretches through it. Uprooted from its five-thousand-year-old traditions by imperialists in 1905, colonized in 1910, decimated by war in 1950, and shaken by an economic collapse in 1997, South Korea has witnessed destruction time and again. Yet, defying all conventional wisdom, South Korea has more than recovered from these tragedies; the nation has exploded onto the international stage with one of the most successful economies and highest literacy rates in the world. Many scholars have studied this fascinating story through the lenses of economic and political theories. However, for a nation with a long-standing tradition of Confucian philosophical thought, it is limiting to examine the economic and political development of Korea separately from the changing landscape of gender roles. Through qualitative interviews with eighty-seven adults between the ages of nineteen and eighty-three, I show that neither conventional economic theories nor policies of development have fully captured the complexity of gendered realities and the consequences of recent social change on the structure of the modern Korean family. I examine four manifestations of changing gender norms: the rising importance of education, the growing dissatisfaction with employment opportunities, the divergent attitudes towards marriage and divorce, and the generational differences in the views of what defines a proper man or woman. As the government of South Korea considers revising the Inheritance Law this year, my findings have implications for the governmental action needed to properly address the transforming face of the Korean family and the necessity for gender parity.

CREATING A SUBURB IN BPS:
HOW BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS' WHITE MIDDLE CLASS NAVIGATES AN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT



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ABSTRACT

White, middle class parents are the anomaly in Boston Public Schools, an urban school district plagued by historical racism and segregation. Yet despite being the minority in the district, this group of parents is able to maximize their children's educational outcomes. This study uses qualitative interviews, in the context of demographic data, to examine how these parents form the networks that ultimately shape their school choice decisions, and how once in the system, these same parents leverage existing skills, knowledge and network ties to ensure the schools meet their expectations. All the while, they create a separate school system within the BPS system that isolates their children, and their own resources, from the larger student body. While previous studies have looked at school choice, parental involvement and parental networks separately, this study demonstrates a case where networks can determine both choice and involvement. In this way it adds to network theory, as well as existing literature about urban school choice and middle class parental involvement. Further, this study adds to the debate over whether middle class families really are a positive addition to urban school districts.

A HIPHOP HABITUS:
A LYRICAL LIFESTYLE FOR YOUNG BLACK MALES



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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine how the ways young black males evaluate and interpret hip-hop form a habitus for them to construct identity. Building on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, starting with their work with habitus, the embodied set of acquired preferences, tastes, and dispositions composed from past experiences and generative of individual and collective practices. I conducted 20 interviews with young black men from the Boston area who are consumers of hip-hop to analyze how their patterns in engaging the music are also found in their construction of identity based characteristics and ideologies. Patterns that reflect the subjective and selective consumption of the music result, as consumers employ evaluative listening strategies in response to hip-hop's evolution. The result is a more personalized and agency-based embodiment of the music in subjects that redefines the past applications of habitus. This reconstructed notion accounts for traditional elements of habitus, including: embodiment, and its generative and acquired capacity, yet also accounts for new understandings for how individuals opt-in to their fields. Individuals in most fields discern the level of immersion they opt-in to their field and the subsequent element of that field they embody. Additionally this research demonstrates that hip-hop resonates with individual listeners through the concept of collective identity, or identifying with a group based on shared characteristics. I argue that hip-hop is a field of habitus for young black males in Boston as it draws on the power of collective identity.

ARE WE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER?
UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION NONPROFITS THROUGH THE LENS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY



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ABSTRACT

Many perceive the American public education system to be in crisis, especially for disadvantaged populations. In addition to reform efforts by governments, school districts, and education scholars, an interesting source of reform is education nonprofits that work directly with schools to improve education. These nonprofits have proliferated and are the focus of this thesis. For this thesis, when I use the term "education nonprofits," I am specifically referring to groups that work within schools and serve low-income communities. Prominent examples of such education nonprofits are Teach for America and City Year. I use a mixed-methods, case study approach of 33 education nonprofits to understand how these organizations view the most salient problems facing public education and their strategies for addressing those problems. I explore how education nonprofits vary, how their leaders view the problems of education in the U.S., and whether the proliferation of education nonprofits and their efforts to challenge the status quo can be considered a social movement. To do so, I conduct a content analysis of each organization's online material, including its mission statement, framing literature, and recruitment materials. I then conduct in-depth interviews with founders or leaders with executive positions at education nonprofits. Education nonprofits differ in various and important ways. Generally, they fall into two overarching categories: "teaching corps" and "supplementals." Teaching corps are organizations that recruit teachers and place them in low income schools. Supplementals are organizations that work directly in and with schools by placing people in schools, but do not place teachers in the classroom. These organizations act as "supplements" to what the schools provide. This categorization helps one to understand and explain how education nonprofits vary, particularly with regard to how they operate and address what they see as the critical problem in education. I make additional categorizations within the teaching corps and supplementals that also have explanatory value. I analyzed educational nonprofits in the context of social movement theory. Should the proliferation of education nonprofits and their challenge to the status quo be considered a social movement to change education? I conclude that there are arguments both ways, and I focus on the factors that make it a difficult question the answer. Even if one concludes this is not a social movement, these organizations nonetheless can be profitably analyzed using aspects of social movement theory to provide a better understanding of them.

NAVIGATING BARRIERS, MOBILIZING STRENGTHS:
HOW IMMIGRANT PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT TRANSLATE INTO ACTION



FRANCESCA SMITH

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explain how poor and working-class immigrant families navigate barriers and mobilize strengths as they support their children's educations in the United States. My study draws upon and contributes to sociological theories of parent involvement and the activation of capital as well as studies of the immigrant experience and ethos. Using data from twenty semi-structured interviews with low-income Dominican immigrant parents of elementary school students, I illustrate the structural contexts that these families live in, the perceptions they hold about school involvement, and the actions they take to engage with the American schooling process. My results show that despite respondents' emphasis on the value of parent involvement and the importance of parent-teacher partnerships, there are many missed opportunities and information gaps in these families' connections with schools. Parents work diligently to support their children in both traditional and nontraditional ways, yet are limited by practical constraints—including language barriers, hectic work schedules, and personal issues of mental health. Though these families express general satisfaction with their experiences with American schools, they often overlook their shallow relationships with school staff and potential opportunities to have a deeper impact on their children's educations. This analysis of the intersections between immigrant families and American schools has implications for education policy, informing how school leaders can more effectively engage with marginalized communities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVENTION WORKERS NOMINATED BY LOCAL UGANDAN VILLAGE LEADERS:
UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATIONS FOR DELEGATING POWER



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ABSTRACT

Development initiatives increasingly regard the participation of beneficiaries as essential to improving provision of public goods. External groups often ask local leaders to nominate community residents to help implement social good interventions. My thesis addresses the following unresolved questions: Which characteristics predict nomination by local leaders to serve as community-based intervention workers? Do these characteristics vary with the type of social good intervention and the type of nominating local leader? Are local leaders' nominations for intervention workers motivated by self-interest or desire to help the community? I innovate by using a unique combination of interview and network survey data on eight villages in southwestern Uganda: a 2011–2012 sociocentric network study of 1,669 adults and original fieldwork interviews asking four types of local leaders to nominate individuals to help implement hypothetical health, female empowerment, technology, and agricultural interventions. Individuals with a direct relationship with a local leader, higher socioeconomic status, and higher out-degree and in-degree social network centrality are more likely to be nominated as intervention workers. Females are even more likely to be nominated by female local council representatives or for interventions that conform to a traditional female gender role. Local chairmen are less likely to nominate individuals with whom they have close relationships, suggesting their elected positions hold them to greater accountability than the other local leaders to their communities. Local leaders justify their nominations with reasons that support the community good, but the significant correlation between close relationship with a local leader and nomination status suggests that self-interested motives are present.