

SOCILOGY 2017 SENIOR THESIS WRITERS

UNPACKING SHOPFLOOR SOLIDARITY: HOW ETHIOPIAN IMMIGRANTS DRAW BOUNDARIES IN THE MEAT PACKING INDUSTRY

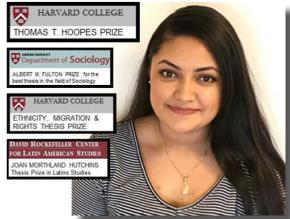


SARA A. ATSKÉ
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ABSTRACT

A New York Times feature from 1987 about a meat packing factory headlined Misery on the Meat Packing Plant highlighted the plant's hazardous working conditions, refrigerated cold, greasy floors, injury-inducing repeated motions, and supervisors' incessant requests to work faster. I conducted 32 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Ethiopian immigrants, both men and women, who have immigrated to the U.S. and now work for Hans Mueller, a meat packing plant in a small town in the Midwest. With my research, I explore how solidarity develops among line workers, to what extent it exists on the shopfloor, and how it relates to their Ethiopian immigrant experiences? I explore the relationship between weak institutional support and the public narrative of individualism in relation to the solidaristic practices that played out on the shopfloor. According to my findings, workers develop a language individualism in the context of a weak union presence and unenforced safety policies yet practice solidarity on the shopfloor only drawing boundaries between themselves and coworkers they identify as 'lazy.'

MIGRANT SMUGGLING: UNDERSTANDING THE COYOTAJE STRUCTURE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR IMMIGRATION POLICY

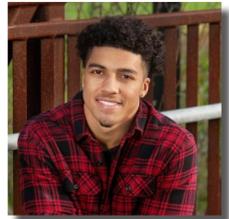


LORENA AVILÉS TRUJILLO
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ABSTRACT

Through restrictive U.S. immigration policies, the Mexico-U.S. border has become an increasingly militarized and dangerous place to navigate. Motivated by border-crossing narratives that are too often ignored, I ask the question: If immigration is a human right, then what happens when human rights are not protected by political institutions? To answer this question, I used migrant smuggling in the Mexico-U.S. border as a case study of the effects of human rights violations in a transnational setting. I interviewed 40 Mexican adults in the Chicago-land area who used the services of human smugglers to enter the U.S. I conclude that while immigration policies target individual migrants and smugglers, they fail to address the systematic status of the coyotaje structure. As such, immigration policies strengthen the smugglers and perpetuate the human rights violations of immigrants. Being largely defined by its illegality, the coyotaje system reacts and adapts to outside, legal and illegal influences, including border bandits, drug cartels, the Mexican police force, and the United States Border Patrol. Therein, the coyotaje system constructs migrants as uninformed clients, treats them as merchandise, and delivers them as financially vulnerable individuals to a new market that is eager to exploit them.

SPORTS AS LIFE'S GREAT EQUALIZER: CLASS-BASED DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES IN HOW PARENTS USE YOUTH SPORTS TO RAISE THEIR CHILDREN



BLADE BRADY
ADVISOR: HOPE HARVEY

ABSTRACT

Children's participation in competitive youth sports has come to occupy an increasingly prominent role in family's lives. Families are devoting an unprecedented amount of time, energy, and money to try and give their children the best chance to play on the most elite teams, and hopefully earn a college scholarship. While previous sociological research has examined the class gap in extracurricular participation, as well as the effects of extracurricular activities on various family dynamics, little to no research has been done on the consequences of devoting such a large portion of family's lives to this ultra-competitive, ultra-high stakes extracurricular activity of sports. This study examines whether there are differences in what working- and middle-class parents hope their children gain from participating in competitive sports, and how parents of each class help their children achieve these goals.

PRACTICING THE LOVE ETHIC: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF COMMUNITY IN CORNERSTONE THEATER COMPANY'S GHOST TOWN



EMMA CAREY COBB
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ABSTRACT

Based on ethnographic research conducted in the summer of 2016 during the production of the play Ghost Town in Venice, California, my thesis explores the ethos and community-based methodology of Los Angeles's Cornerstone Theater Company. I argue that Cornerstone not only embodies, but also institutionalizes, bell hooks's theory of the love ethic. The love ethic proposes that society must turn towards an active conception of love in order to face the fear that supports systems of domination and oppression. I found that Cornerstone creates this atmosphere of radical respect and reciprocity through their actions in key parts of the process: the interactions and partnerships with the community, the space provided for sharing stories, and the rituals that cement connection. In today's current socio-political climate, where division is the dominating narrative in the United States, understanding Cornerstone's success at creating both social bonds and bridges is imperative.

INSTITUTIONS, INEQUALITIES, AND INFANT DEATH: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF HEALTH CARE DECOMMODIFICATION IN LATIN AMERICA



WILLIAM GARDNER
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ABSTRACT

Institutionalist approaches to the study of health stratification often focus on the impact of the welfare state on health, but this research has been mostly limited to OECD nations. Using individual-level data on 171,944 births from the Demographic and Health Surveys, I examine the impact of health care de commodification on infant mortality in seven low- and middle-income countries in Latin America, focusing on the percent of public health expenditure of total health expenditure and the presence of a skilled medical attendant at birth. I find that health care de commodification has a significant impact in reducing infant mortality in low- and middle-income countries in Latin America; this effect is significant in both the neonatal and postneonatal periods of infancy; and this effect is heterogeneous across wealth groups, mother education levels, and mother marital status. This study expands the literature on the impact of the welfare state on health by examining this effect in an understudied region. It is also the first study to operationalize Bamba's health care de commodification index (2005) for use in explaining reductions in infant mortality, and is the first study to examine cross-nationally the role of the welfare state in reducing infant mortality specifically within Latin America while examining heterogeneous treatment effects between groups.

RENT-BURDENED: THE COMMUNITY CONSEQUENCES OF UNAFFORDABLE HOUSING



HENRY MYNOTT GOMORY
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ABSTRACT

In the past quarter-century, wages have stagnated for a large swathe of workers, while city living has enjoyed a resurgent popularity, creating rising unaffordability in urban housing. Despite this trend, very little research has addressed the consequences of unaffordability in the private housing market. This paper begins to fill this gap by documenting sharp increases in the percent of income renters spend on housing (rent burden) in Boston and Chicago, between 1990 and 2015, and showing rent burden's unequal spatial concentration. I use community surveys and administrative data to show that areas with concentrated rent burden have disproportionately low levels of collective efficacy, friend networks, neighborhood custodianship, and other positive social traits. I present analyses that probe a number of possible spurious relationships and mediating mechanisms, and ultimately I speculate on how rent burden might be affecting social health.

THE IMPACT OF CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE ON VISIONS OF STATE INVOLVEMENT IN VERMONT



AVNI NAHAR
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ABSTRACT

Restorative justice is a promising alternative to the traditional criminal justice system. However, state involvement with restorative justice is often questioned. This thesis seeks to understand how differing conceptualizations of restorative justice affect perspectives on state involvement. The literature is clear: individuals who focus on the experiences of offenders or victims are less likely to support state involvement, while individuals who focus on the community are more likely to support state involvement. This study tests this connection through interviews with 60 stakeholders in the criminal and restorative justice system in Vermont. A typology of restorative justice is created using the data from these interviews. This yields perspectives that complicate the conclusions drawn in the literature review. These findings contribute to our understanding of the appropriate role for the state in the implementation of restorative justice services in the United States.

FREE TO VOTE: THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF FORMERLY INCARCERATED BOSTON RESIDENTS



ENIOLUWADA OLUWAFUNTO POPOOLA
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ABSTRACT

This research aims to uncover the political participation of formerly incarcerated Boston residents. The goal of the research is to understand the voting behaviors and community involvement of individuals residing in a state with little or no restrictions on post-release voting of ex-felons. Drawing upon qualitative interviews of 22 of Boston's formerly incarcerated, I explore views on the purpose and impact of voting, understanding of local and national politics, past and present voting behavior, and involvement in the local community. Ultimately I argue that the feelings and rhetoric of political exclusivity, which respondents expressed as not unique to the formerly incarcerated population but instead indicates a larger issue in American society of the failure to incorporate marginalized groups into the fabric of democracy. However while there existed a lack of trust in government, signs of political exclusion, individuals still engaged with electoral processes on some level indicating that there are still factors that compel people to partake in a system that does not always welcome them.

PROSPECTIVE LEGACY STUDENTS AND COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS



KARA E. ROBERTS
ADVISOR: TIFFANY TING

ABSTRACT

I studied prospective legacy students' experiences and decision-making processes while they were applying early to the elite school that one or more of their parents attended. Legacy preference in college admissions is a visible way in which the process is not fully meritocratic, as society would like to believe. I interviewed 12 prospective legacy high school students from across the country who applied early to Harvard, Princeton or Yale and found that prospective legacy students are aware that the college admissions process is not equitable and that they have advantages in the process due to their family and socioeconomic status. Yet, they still use their advantages and connections in the hope of being accepted. I demonstrate that they reconcile their meritocratic beliefs with their privileged actions by focusing on their own individual experiences and merit, reproducing socioeconomic inequality.

RE-VISITING THE OPT-OUT DEBATE: PERSPECTIVES FROM YOUNG WOMEN AT ELITE UNIVERSITIES IN THE U.S. AND SWEDEN



PAULINE RAQUEL RYAN
ADVISOR: MARY BRINTON

ABSTRACT

Highly educated American women "opting-out" of their careers to stay home has posed a puzzle to scholars of gender inequality. Some argue that women's departure from the workforce represents a genuine choice of motherhood over career. Others counter that the structure of the American workplace and inequitable arrangements at home make it impossible for women in elite careers to successfully combine family and work. Drawing on in-depth interviews with women at Harvard University and Uppsala University, I join this opting out debate by contributing a cross-cultural perspective. I find that while the two groups' work-family ideals are remarkably similar, their beliefs about attaining these ideals are quite different with the Harvard women being much more pessimistic than their Uppsala counterparts. I explain these differences by pointing to policies in Sweden that facilitate work-life balance and to the inflexibility problem of elite careers in the United States. My findings support the idea that American women's departure from elite careers often represents a decision that women wrestle with long before they are compelled to make it.

RAISING CHILDREN: HOW NEIGHBORHOOD INSTITUTIONS SHAPE PARENTING PRACTICES IN THE SOUTH BRONX

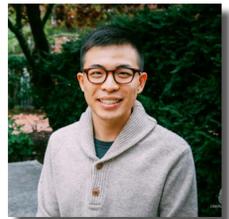


JASMIN ELIZABETH SALAZAR
ADVISOR: KRISTIN PERKINS

ABSTRACT

Children who grow up in consistently high levels of poverty are more likely to experience negative life outcomes. The impact of poverty is mediated through multiple factors such as family (specifically parents and their parenting practices), neighborhoods, and community institutions (e.g. schools, healthcare facilities). Due to the fact that these mediators work together to impact children and alter their life outcomes, children who grow up in inner city neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty are especially vulnerable. This thesis seeks to explore the experiences of low-income parents who are raising children in two neighborhoods of the South Bronx with high levels of concentrated poverty. Specifically, it addresses the question of how parents of the South Bronx are influenced by their neighborhoods in how they conceptualize and carry out their roles as parents through their parenting practices. Using data from thirty-seven semi-structured interviews with parents from the neighborhoods of Hunts Point and Mott Haven, I find that parents are indeed influenced by their neighborhoods in how they conceptualize and carry out their parenting practices. Across the board, both groups of parents acknowledged the multiple difficulties they encounter raising their children in an environment defined by concentrated poverty, but the way that they responded to the neighborhood realities as parents is what is distinct. Through my interviews with parents from Hunts Point, who each participated in a parenting workshop offered by a local nonprofit organization, I find that these parents have internalized their role as parents to mean that they do not let the environment of the neighborhood impact their children in a harmful way. Through my interviews with parents from Mott Haven, who have not participated in a parenting workshop, I find that these parents place less of an emphasis on their own agency as parents to assure that the environment does not negatively impact their children and instead they place a greater emphasis on the structural change that is needed within the community.

HOW STIGMA IMPACTS MENTAL HEALTH: THE MINORITY STRESS MODEL AND UNWED MOTHERS IN SOUTH KOREA



JUHWAN SEO
ADVISOR: MARY BRINTON

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the stress experienced by unwed mothers in South Korea, focusing specifically on the pathways and mechanisms through which stigma, prejudice, and discrimination impact mental health outcomes. I apply the minority stress model to the Korean unwed mother population to test how well the theoretical framework "travels," while also contributing to our understanding of unwed motherhood in Korea. I conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-four Korean unwed mothers. My research finds that unwed mothers face social isolation following their pregnancy. I also find that unwed mothers actively and passively conceal their unwed mother status, and they often cite an unsourced gaze (sisŏn) in their day-to-day experience as unwed mothers as a result of internalized stigma. I argue that each of these findings serves as a pathway between stigma and mental health, and I conclude by discussing the implications of my research findings on the minority stress model.

FATAL BIAS: THE ROLE OF RACE IN SERIAL HOMICIDE IN THE UNITED STATES



JULIA TERESA THOMAS
ADVISOR: CHRIS WINSHIP

ABSTRACT

Serial homicide in America has gripped the public's imagination for many years, but has been the subject of very little academic research. The racial dynamics of serial homicide has been studied even less. This thesis looks to add to the nascent literature on race and serial homicide, dispel incorrect assumptions about the racial dynamics of the phenomenon, and investigate the impact of race on offenders' mobility patterns. This research uses quantitative methods and the dataset used contains almost twice the number of serial murderers as the next largest study on serial homicide in the United States. There are three major findings resulting from this research. First, the widely-held assumption that serial murderers are almost exclusively Caucasian is false. Second, results show that the common perception of serial homicide as a predominantly intraracial phenomenon is also incorrect. Finally, race is statistically significantly correlated with the mobility pattern exhibited by the offender in the execution of their serial homicide behavior.

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX: THE ACQUISITION OF A SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION AMONG URBAN YOUTH IN CAMEROON



MARTINE LAETITIA LEUNGOUE TIANI VESSAH
ADVISOR: ANSHUL KUMAR

ABSTRACT

In an urban society where sex is simultaneously taboo and present in popular culture, how do young Cameroonians acquire a sexual health education? Through a qualitative study of 41 in-depth semi-structure interviews with youths aged 18-25 in Douala, Cameroon, this thesis seeks to explore the current sexual health education landscape and the effects it has on youths' well being. My findings are divided into three categories: parents at home, peers and teachers outside of the home, and media/technology. Ultimately, I found that peer-to-peer communication is most salient in youths' acquisition of sexual health education. Yet, this information is often inaccurate and perpetuates risky behaviors. My research also explains why current sexual health education interventions have failed to account for youths' perspectives. Sexual health education interventions should center youth in the policymaking and occur at an early age.

UNINCORPORATED AND UNPROTECTED: EAST PORTERVILLE AND THE CALIFORNIA DROUGHT



ITZEL LIBERTAD VASQUEZ-RODRIGUEZ
ADVISOR: KATHERINE MORRIS

ABSTRACT

Thousands of people are living without water in their homes since the California Drought began in 2011. The drought has disproportionately affected low-income, Latinx areas in the California Central Valley. This thesis analyzes how residents of East Porterville, an unincorporated area in the Valley with a high immigrant population, are coping with the drought and why recovery has been prolonged. This thesis lends insight to disaster responses and how a lack of institutional representation due to unincorporated status intersects with population inequalities like immigration status and SES. I conducted 39 resident-interviews and 21 key informant interviews in the East Porterville area. I coded interviews using NVivo. The findings reveal how living in an unincorporated area provides no protection against water shortages because the community lacks local political representation, which perpetuates poor housing and public resource infrastructure. This paper expands work on disasters by drawing on research of unincorporated areas, and calls into question the policies governing unincorporated communities in California's Central Valley.

HARVARD, HOME, AND HABITUS: UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL (MIS)MATCH FOR FIRST GENERATION, LOWER-INCOME COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE IVY LEAGUE



TED JOSEPH WHITE
ADVISOR: SIOBHAN GREATOR-VOITH

ABSTRACT

Existing research on first generation, lower-income college students examines their college experience in relation to their traditional college-going peers. Yet, research ignores experiences in students' home environments, where cultural differences may arise. By conducting 34 in-depth interviews of first generation, lower-income students at Harvard and surveying 109 students across the Ivy League colleges, this study examines the cultural differences students experience upon returning to their home lives after matriculating and acclimating to their elite college environments. Students report wide ranging cultural differences at home, including changing relationships and an inability to express their college experiences at home. This study examines how students navigate differences using code-switching strategies to adhere to cultural norms based on the context students are in. This sheds light on decisions upwardly mobile people must make in order to balance their lives at home and at college.

MARRIAGE AS A PACKAGE DEAL: WOMEN'S EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS FAMILY FORMATION IN URBAN CHINA



NU XIONG
ADVISOR: EUNSIL OH

ABSTRACT

Highly-educated young women in urban cities are struggling to navigate China's rapid economic and social changes with rigid cultural attitudes regarding marriage. In cities like Shanghai and Beijing, women live exciting and fast-paced lives where they can experience higher levels of freedom and independence in comparison to their hometowns. Women's exposure and interaction with urban culture, coupled with their educational experiences, have expanded their perspective about what relationships and womanhood can look like outside of conventional norms. Despite this progress and women's emerging independence, however, attitudes regarding expectations for marriage remain extremely rigid. How do women develop expectations for marriage in this context of shifting norms? And why do social expectations for marriage remain so inflexible? Using interview data with 21 women, I find that despite being able to exercise more freedom and agency in their personal lives, women's conceptualization of marriage remains largely shaped by cultural norms and societal beliefs that are centered on expectations for life stability through family formation. As a result, marriage is viewed as a highly attractive and desired choice for women who want to attain stability and status. This leads to the persistence of a rigid marriage norm at the individual level and eventually becomes reinforced by cultural, relational, and structural aspects of family formation norms. My findings indicate that marriage norms in China will continue to persist alongside the country's industrialization, so as long as the family unit remains the core medium through which stability and social security is attained.