

SOCIOLOGY 2022

SENIOR THESIS WRITERS

*"I GUESS...":
YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR IDENTITIES AS TAXPAYERS*



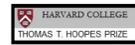
KEVIN BALLEEN

ADVISOR: LEAH GOSE

ABSTRACT

My thesis explored the question: "How do young people develop their identities as taxpayers." To answer my question, I conducted 29 qualitative interviews of young people, ages 18-29, who either paid their 2020 taxes in Massachusetts or were dependents of 2020 Massachusetts. I find that a lack of knowhow and absence of civic connection to taxes, along with overwhelming feelings of neutrality, leads young people to form weak taxpaying identities. I conclude by arguing that stronger youth identities around taxation would be beneficial for American civic engagement. I propose as strategies increased government spending transparency, stronger education on taxation, and building a positive culture around taxation in a similar way to how our society celebrates voting.

*THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY?:
EXPLORING THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF FLEEING DOMESTIC ABUSE, ITS CONNECTION TO FINANCIAL NETWORKS, AND ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH*



FAHIMA BEGUM

ADVISOR: HOLLY HUMMER

ABSTRACT

Violence associated with domestic abuse is often perceived as being resolved by leaving one's partner. Current literature thus rarely evaluates the challenges associated with the fleeing process and the factors impacting one's ability to rebuild their life. Drawing on fifty-one interviews with women identifying as survivors across the United States, I explore in this thesis the varying financial challenges a survivor faces after leaving abuse. I point to how, rather than being a solution to harm, fleeing can often serve as an extension of it. Of those who are able to leave, I found that a survivor's divergent financial networks shape complex processes of survival, and such realities come to serve systemic and interpersonal challenges to a survivor's wellbeing. My conceptualization of fleeing reorients our understanding of domestic violence by highlighting how a survivor's wellbeing goes beyond leaving their partner and constitutes a multi-year long process, suggesting a focus on advocacy work helping women overcome the long-term financial challenges of fleeing.

*DELAYING THE "FINAL STEP":
PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITY, BELONGING, AND U.S. NATURALIZATION FROM MEXICAN LAWFUL PERMANENT RESIDENTS IN THE GREATER HOUSTON, TEXAS AREA*



DANIELA BETANCOURT

ADVISOR: AARON BRENNEN BENAVIDEZ

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates barriers to U.S. Citizenship among Mexican Lawful Permanent Residents (LPR) in the Greater Houston, Texas Area who are eligible to naturalize. I conducted 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews to understand how eligible Mexican LPRs navigate migration, belonging, and U.S. naturalization. Greater political representation and protection against deportation motivate participants to become citizens. However, people may delay naturalization because they already belong to stable communities. Structural barriers and confusion about the process may also inhibit application ability, especially if lower-income. Mexican immigrants in Houston are less likely to naturalize than the national average. Thus, this thesis sheds light on participant experiences to extend literature on LPR and U.S. Citizenship and provides recommendations for policymakers to facilitate obtaining citizenship and increase rights.

*SCHOOLING INTEGRATION:
HOW PUBLIC EDUCATION MAKES REFUGEES INTO AMERICANS*



BRINKLEY BROWN

ADVISOR: DANILO MANDIC

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experiences of 32 refugee students as they learn English and integrate into a predominantly white high school. Our central question is how does the academic integration of ELL students into mainstream classes affect their social integration into the larger school community? Based on in-depth interviews, we find a counterintuitive relationship between academic integration and social integration. Formal academic integration often highlights the symbolic and social boundaries that exist between ELL and American students. Conversely, informal extracurricular involvement blurs these boundaries and fosters social integration. Taken together, we propose that social integration is best understood by examining the interplay between symbolic and social boundaries as they are conceptualized and experienced by individuals within a given context.

*HIDDEN CURRICULUM OF ORGANIZED ATHLETICS:
STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY AND ACCESSING ELITE INSTITUTIONS*



REBECCA DUTTON

ADVISOR: NICOLETTE BARDELE

ABSTRACT

This study asks: how does a student's identity as a student-athlete in high school impact their ability to gain access into elite institutions? Findings from 29 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with current Harvard club and varsity athletes suggest that student-athletes acquired social and cultural capital due to their involvement in high school athletics. The accumulation of capital appeared to follow a tiered system based on the salience of the student-athlete identity, and the student's ability to leverage that identity in fostering relationships and expanding their social network. These relationships, as well as the social and cultural capital student-athletes acquired throughout high school, provided an express pathway in the college admissions process, as they were seen as indicators of a moral high ground and a student's ability to achieve success in a college setting.

*"THE GUN MADE HIM OLDER":
RACE, JUDICIAL DECISION-MAKING, AND JUVENILE LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE*



IAN B. HAYES

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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Supreme Court in *Miller v. Alabama* (2012) held that mandatory juvenile life without parole (JLWOP) sentences violate the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment. Under *Miller*, individuals sentenced to JLWOP can petition for new sentencing that consider "youth and its attendant characteristics." Analyzing 24 Illinois court opinions assessing challenges to JLWOP, I explore factors that underlie judicial constructions of the potential for rehabilitation. I find that the sentencing review for JLWOP following *Miller*, while operating on facially objective characteristics, becomes a site of both racialization and dehumanization in which culpability is relitigated. To bring about the substantive lenience envisioned in *Miller*, I argue a 10-year cap should be placed on all sentences imposed for juvenile criminal offenses.

*ENSURING DOMESTIC UTILITY:
RACIALIZED WOMEN, AFFECTIVE LABOR, AND THE EXPANSION OF AMERICAN EMPIRE*



MAYA MORET JENKINS

ADVISOR: CRESA PUGH

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the affective labor regimes under which enslaved Black women in the pre-Emancipation United States (1750-1865) and Filipina women in the colonial Philippines (1898-1946) worked. I analyze archival materials that emerge from these sites in order to identify technologies that appropriated racialized women's affective labors as a means of constructing, maintaining, and expanding American Empire. My analysis makes legible continuities in use of technologies of power across these two distinct sites. I find that state and colonial apparatuses rendered Black and Filipina women's affective labors productive of American Empire and its structuring racial hierarchies through the efficient commodification, organization, and mobilization of those women's reproductive capacities, sexual labors, domestic arrangements, and gendered subjectivities.

*BLACK BEAUTY IS GREEN:
EXPLORING CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND INSTANCES OF SUSTAINABILITY IN BLACK HAIR CARE*



ANASTASI ACHIENG ONYANGO

ADVISOR: BRIANNA CASTRO

ABSTRACT

Scholars contend the climate crisis is a racist crisis. Black hair is an entry point to analyze how environmental racism works in conjunction with other systems, particularly beauty politics. Narrative data from YouTube videos and semi-structured interviews highlight material instances of (un)sustainability through commodity fetishization subversion and the disruption of the established dynamic of producer to capitalist to consumer. Moreover, the material process of unlearning capitalist tenets was catalyzed by the ideological process of unlearning, and the ideological process occurred in two ways: prioritizing psychological health and a growth mindset. In this way, my application of (un)sustainability, gender embodiment theory and Black Feminist Ecology provides a blueprint for instituting (un)sustainability as a daily ritual of resistance against American Capitalism and a path towards securing Black women's right to self-determination.