

SOCIOLOGY 2019

SENIOR THESIS WRITERS

"HOW DO YOU Q?"
INVESTIGATING UNDERGRADUATES' UNDERSTANDING OF AND INTERACTIONS WITH HARVARD UNIVERSITY'S COURSE EVALUATION SYSTEM



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ABSTRACT

Course evaluations, the most widely used assessment tool for the quality of instruction and course content, are a key platform for the student voice in higher education. However, there is tension in the literature about the effectiveness of such evaluations, and past studies have prioritized quantitative methods. This thesis addresses this tension and methodological gap by investigating Harvard undergraduates' experiences with the course evaluation system known as the Q. A survey administered to the graduating class of 2020 (~300 responses) and thirteen in-depth follow-up interviews serve as sources of quantitative and qualitative data. My findings suggest that students have limited understandings of the institutional uses for the Q at Harvard, resulting in primarily self- and peer-centered approaches to completing their Q scores. Thus, the administration must engage with students to fill the gaps in their knowledge and make them more informed evaluators—more knowledgeable users of this platform for student advocacy.

BEYOND THE VOTE:
IMPACTS OF FELONY DISENFRANCHISEMENT ON EXCLUSION, IDENTITY, AND PARENTING



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ABSTRACT

Felony disenfranchisement influences the lives of returning citizens in a variety of manners beyond the inability to vote. This mixed methods thesis uses interviews, surveys, and ethnography to consider the role of felony disenfranchisement in the lives of returning citizens in Florida. Felony disenfranchisement acts as an additional exclusionary policy applied to people who are justice involved. It is received as a method of disempowerment by returning citizens and a sign that their community does not trust them nor value their opinions. Felony disenfranchisement particularly impacts parents, removing opportunities for them to role model voting for their children and often undermining their positive identities as parents. These data point to expansive impacts of felony disenfranchisement on people's lives beyond being forced to sit out on Election Day. Each of these findings are potential mechanisms explaining increased recidivism among people who are disenfranchised.

IDENTITY AND (DIS)INTEGRATION:
EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGHOUT THE HIGHER EDUCATION LIFE COURSE



ELISE CHAPPELL ALEXANDER

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ABSTRACT

While more than 11 percent of American undergraduates report a disability, student disability identity within higher educational institutional contexts has received little scholarly attention. This research investigates the relationship between disability identity and social integration as students navigate each year of college life. I draw from semi-structured interviews with Harvard College students with visible, invisible, and conditionally visible disabilities—the latter, a novel identity category coined and critically engaged in this study. I argue that these categories of disability shape distinct pathways of social integration, in which an experience of exclusion during students' first year catalyzes complex and ongoing negotiations with social stigma. I triangulate these findings with analyses of Harvard's structures of disability support and culture of diversity, suggesting that institutional contexts mediate students' experiences of stigma. I next draw from an exploratory comparison with University of Massachusetts, Boston, a flagship public four-year university, to further demonstrate how institutional factors profoundly shape student experiences, identity, and integration. To conclude, I offer theoretical and practical recommendations for improving integration of students with disabilities, with the disability identity intact.

[blackstudents-list] [IMPT] Fwd: Check out the opportunity below!! PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACCESS WITHIN THE BLACK COMMUNITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, YALE UNIVERSITY, AND HARVARD UNIVERSITY



EUNICE NYANCHAMA MICHIEKA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explore the relationship between the robustness of a campus' black student organizational community (BSOC) and the mechanisms by which black students gain access to and make use of professional development resources within these same communities. Through interview-based research focusing on the campuses of the University of Pennsylvania, Yale University, and Harvard University, I propose that BSOCs at elite colleges provide an effective space and mechanism in which black undergraduate students can develop social capital and increase access to professional development services and resources. In contrast to a simple direct correlation between the robustness of the black student organizational communities and the level of professional development access, the research reveals that the type and variety of organizations present on a campus, themselves, structure three unique access networks for black undergraduates. With this discovery in mind, I conclude by offering distinct recommendations for the improvement of professional development access based on each campus' given resources and present structures.

SCHOOL, COMMUNITY, AND COLLEGE DECISIONS:
RURAL AND URBAN HIGH-ACHIEVING YOUTH OUTMIGRATION IN LOUISIANA



KAYCIE BENNETT

ADVISOR: KRISTINA BRANT

ABSTRACT

The outmigration of high-achieving youth from America's rural and urban areas raises concerns for those left behind. This thesis evaluates the causes and mechanisms of youth outmigration suggested by rural researchers and extends this literature to urban communities. I investigate the role of high schools in youth outmigration. In qualitative case studies of one urban and one rural Louisiana high school, I explore high-achieving students' college decision processes. I interviewed students and school personnel, and I conducted ethnographic classroom observations. I find that students express mixed preferences for staying or leaving, but most stay close to home. Urban students leave at slightly higher rates than their rural counterparts. Teachers are gatekeepers who rely on their own knowledge of colleges to push students farther from home. Finally, structures of tracking and school choice shape teachers' perceptions of students and thus how teachers disseminate knowledge, especially in the urban district. These findings suggest that similar narratives of success in rural and urban schools push high-achieving students to leave, but place-based conditions and financial concerns mediate these messages.

WHITE TABLECLOTHS AND WHITE STANDARDS:
HOW CRITICS EVALUATE AUTHENTICITY AND STATUS IN MEXICAN AND FRENCH CUISINE



MARGARET ROSS

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ABSTRACT

The social hierarchy of cuisines reflects racial and class power dynamics in the United States. Through the cases of Mexican and French cuisine, I argue that this hierarchy is sustained by the criteria disseminated by taste-making restaurant critics. In a qualitative comparison of newspaper reviews of Mexican and French restaurants, I show that the concepts authenticity and status are reflective of a white European standard for cuisine. The criteria used by restaurant critics show that authenticity is a tool of establishing status. In the Mexican context authenticity is associated with rustic domesticity while French authenticity is constructed by institutionalized guidelines, giving it an easier path to be seen as high status. To critics, high status in Mexican restaurants is constructed by their deviating from the negative American stereotype of Mexican food, which may compromise their recognizability as Mexican. French food becomes high status to critics when it fits common American expectations for French restaurants and executing that mold well. These differing criteria reflect a historically European-dominated culinary tradition and reinforce barriers to entry into the category of high status for non-white cuisines. My findings demonstrate the behavior that often leads to gentrification and the marginalization of ethnic cultural consumption goods.

THE SPECTER OF ACHIEVEMENT:
PERCEPTIONS OF CLASS MOBILITY AMONG FIRST-GENERATION ASIAN AMERICANS



CAROLINE THANH DIEP

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ABSTRACT

Because Asian Americans (AAs) hold the highest median household income and educational attainment among all U.S. Census groups, this population acts as a case study for immigrant class mobility. Sociologists traditionally argued that AA success results from either (1) remnant Confucian culture or (2) immigration policies pre-selecting for skilled immigrants. However, neither theory is fully explanatory. I attempt to address this by investigating the mechanisms underpinning how first-generation, AAs define success and achievement. The 16 high school seniors recruited for semi-structured interviews tend to be embedded in ethnic enclaves—communities predominantly composed of other first-generation, AAs. Within these closed social networks, conventional wisdom emphasizes good grades, college diplomas, and financial stability. Ethnic enclave values are accredited to a uniquely AA identity heavily tied to class, the immigrant experience, and sacrifice. Tensions between resources and identity compel individuals to follow a strict pathway to success, cutting across individual variation in parental occupation and education.

"THE ULTIMATE SAY WAS HERS":
THE DOULA'S ROLE IN ENSURING EMPOWERMENT, CHOICE, AND CONSENT WITHIN MODERN MATERNITY CARE



LAUREN ALEXIS SIERRA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a qualitative study of how doulas help women become empowered through childbirth in a medicalized system where the focus has shifted away from the lived experience of those giving birth. Thirty semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with doulas in the state of Massachusetts. This thesis explores the lived experiences of doulas in their profession and how they carry out their role to ensure that women feel in control and seen throughout labor, leaving their births feeling empowered by their experience. The motivations of entering the doula field, issues of accessibility, labor room relationships, and methods of empowerment are all considered. The results suggest that doulas can work most efficiently when all parties involved in the birth are properly educated on the role of the doula and their ability to serve as an asset to everyone involved in the labor room, not just the birthing mother.

HOUSING A COMMUNITY:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOECONOMIC HOUSING DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN BOSTON NEIGHBORHOODS



KATE GEHLING

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ABSTRACT

Neighborhoods in the United States have grown more socioeconomically segregated, increasing inequities and causing housing authorities to implement voucher and mixed-income housing policies in efforts to socioeconomically integrate urban residents. Currently, there is limited evidence regarding the impact of housing integration on the social interactions and norms of neighborhoods. I investigate how socioeconomic housing diversity is related to neighborhood social outcomes in Boston, MA. Utilizing survey and census data, interviews with four community leaders in two neighborhoods, and a lost letter experiment, I find that socioeconomic housing diversity is associated with lower levels of social cohesion, social control, collective efficacy, and social network size, particularly if the neighborhood has gentrified over the past twenty years. Still, I also discover that non-material factors, such as strong community pride, can counteract the negative relationship between housing diversity and social outcomes. My findings have important implications for current and future housing policy.

MOBILITY IN THE MOTOR CITY:
EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PERSISTENT SEGREGATION IN POST-WAR DETROIT



JANAÉ KEANNA STRICKLAND

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ABSTRACT

In the midst of rapid social and economic change during the post-World War II period, city planners throughout the country followed federal policymakers in crafting urban renewal policies that favored white suburbanites over black inner-city residents; these policies fostered profound inequalities that persist to this day. Detroit was a case in point. The city's leadership poorly managed and conservatively funded its once-extensive and widely-used mass transit system, defended race and class-based divisions in housing, and heavily invested in social programs that would benefit wealthy white residents and city stakeholders, creating conditions that fostered the end of mass public transit in the metropolitan area by 1956. I argue that these decisions squandered an important opportunity to improve the conditions and social mobility prospects of Detroit's poor black residents during the mid-twentieth century. The decline of mass transit service, the ascendance of a car-centric metropolitan structure, and low-income black households' financial barriers to private automobile ownership contributed to persistent economic and social exclusion that are painfully present in Detroit's black neighborhoods today.

PLAYED BY THE SYSTEM:
THE DISADVANTAGED EXPERIENCE OF RECRUITED ATHLETES AT ELITE INSTITUTIONS



OMOBOLANLE ADEOLA HAMBOLU

ADVISOR: MARY WATERS

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the institutional forces that shape how student-athletes perceive their identity and sense of belonging at a hyper-intellectual, elite college. The study's data center on thirty-three semi-structured interviews with students, athletes and administrators from Harvard University. My findings reveal that student athletes at the institution encounter more barriers than other students when accessing and utilizing resources at Harvard primarily due to the lack of communication between the athletic and academic programs of the institution. Due to scheduling conflicts, student-athletes are implicitly asked to prioritize their athletics and forego several opportunities essential to their wholistic development as students at the institution. The pressure to prioritize athletics also leads to minimal engagement on campus and exclusion from the overarching Harvard community.

MORE WALLS THAN BRIDGES:
THE IMPACT OF STIGMA ON MANITOBAN FOSTER PARENTS AND INDIGENOUS FOSTER CHILDREN WITH FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER



ELSIE ADELE TELLIER

ADVISOR: ALIX WINTER

ABSTRACT

The Canadian province of Manitoba has the highest number of children in foster care in all of Canada. Children in Manitoban foster care are also disproportionately Indigenous and disabled. While there is quantitative data about the foster care system there have been relatively few qualitative sociological research studies done. Drawing on 15 qualitative interviews conducted with Manitoban Foster Parents who were currently or had previously fostered Indigenous children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum this thesis examines the ways in which stigma created by being a foster parent or a child in foster care affects both foster parents and children. This thesis will also look at how both ableism and considerations of race further impact foster children and foster parents.

FILLING THE EMPTY NEXT:
EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE-BORN SENIOR MIGRANTS IN THE GREATER BOSTON AREA



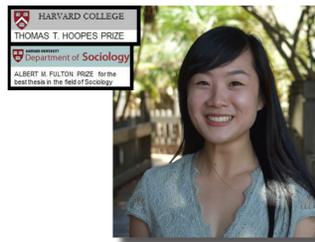
JESPER KE

ADVISOR: ROBERTO G GONZALES

ABSTRACT

Chinese-born senior migrants constitute a growing population of migrants living in the United States. This term refers to migrants who immigrate to a new country at an advanced age, typically after retirement. I conducted 26 semi-structured interviews with Chinese-born senior migrants living in Greater Boston. My thesis presents three main findings about these migrants: (1.) They conceive of family-based reasons as the primary motivation for migration to the U.S. (2.) They experience great difficulty adjusting to family and social life in the U.S. due to language and cultural barriers and (3.) They experience significant social isolation in Greater Boston, and must seek out new social networks either through children or through neighbors. These findings contribute to a growing body of scholarly work about senior migrants living in the United States, as well as larger theoretical debates about migration motivations, assimilation, and migrant socialization.

THE ROLE OF LINGUISTIC CAPITAL IN THE HEALTH PERCEPTIONS OF FORMERLY DETAINED AND DEPORTED HISPANIC IMMIGRANT MEN



STEPHANIE WU

ADVISOR: MO TORRES

ABSTRACT

Thousands of immigrants are currently detained for immigration purposes throughout the U.S. However, little is known about how language affects how individuals understand the role of detention in their health outcomes. Through conducting interviews with 29 formerly detained and deported Hispanic adult men, I found that individuals with high linguistic capital, or who were fluent in English, generally had positive interactions with correctional officers, had more access to institutional resources like jobs, and experienced post-traumatic growth as a result of their detention experience. In contrast, individuals with low linguistic capital had negative interactions with correctional officers, less access to institutional resources, and experienced depression and suicide ideation. The experiences of U.S. military veterans differed from both groups. These findings hold implications for the treatment of detained individuals and can help to inform U.S. immigration and detention policies.