

SOCIOLOGY 2021

SENIOR THESIS WRITERS

HIDDEN DIVERSITY DISPARITIES IN ELITE COLLEGE ATHLETICS: Race, Belonging, And The Purpose Of Sports In The Ivy League



GABRIELLE CHOI FERNANDOPULLE
ADVISOR: ETHAN RAKER

ABSTRACT

My thesis examines racialized experiences within predominantly white varsity sports in the Ivy League. I took a mixed methods approach, combining analysis of racial demographic data and in-depth interviews with student-athletes and head coaches. Results show that most sports have an underrepresentation of student-athletes of color relative to the student body. In-depth interviews reveal that white coaches and student-athletes see their whiteness in relation to the suffering of BIPOC peers, instead of as a privilege, often contributing to BIPOC student-athletes' isolation on these teams. Further, the structure of athletic recruiting fails to hold coaches and institutions accountable for their lack of diverse teams. I conclude with how the Ivy League can advance diversity and inclusion in sports.

"AT WHAT A COST!:" A Mixed Methods Analysis Of The Racial Ideas Black Students Learned From Their U.S. High Schools



KETURAH JEANENE GADSON
ADVISOR: NICOLETTE BARDELE/ALIYAH EL-AMIN (AAAS)

ABSTRACT

In the era of colorblind racism, schools are often assumed to be race-neutral. To interrupt this assumption, this project combines sociological literature on schools as "race makers" other disciplines to discern the types of racial ideas conveyed about Blackness to Black students in today's U.S. high schools. I work with 37 Black incoming first-year college students who all attend the same private, elite Northeastern college. I use mostly qualitative methods to survey all participants and conduct in-depth interviews with nine. This study draws out that Black students actively negotiate the ideas conveyed about Blackness in their high schools with significant implications for their emotional well-beings. As the final contribution, I test a novel mini-intervention to learn how we can intervene on any harmful and racist ideas Black students may have learned from their high schools.

NUUESTRA VOZ: How Spanish Media Influences The Identity and Political Attitudes of Latino Immigrants



DEBORA GONZALEZ
ADVISOR: BO YUN PARK

ABSTRACT

Using data from an exploratory survey, ethnographic observations, and interpretive interviews, this project shows how Spanish-speaking media has a discernible influence on the group identity formation of Latin American immigrants in the United States by converging a wide variety of narratives into the shared interests of an established American community—the Latinos. It also shows that Latino identity formation is decoupled from political attitude formation for many Latinos, especially conservatives, who feel misrepresented by pan-ethnic media. Contributing to the literature on the identity formation of Latinos, this project examines the Latino identity formation for immigrants—individuals joining an already existing ethnic category—in relationship to the Spanish media while enhancing our understanding of conservative Latinos, a largely understudied group.

DEMOCRATIZING EXILE: A Genealogy of Cancel Culture



BRIANNA ASHLY HARRIS
ADVISOR: AARON BENAVIDEZ

ABSTRACT

The diffusion of the phrase "cancel(led)" across social media, and the adapted "cancel culture" into the political sphere, brought about two major shifts in meaning. In its earliest form, "cancel(led)" communicated lighthearted annoyance or frustration. Then, "woke" Twitter "cancel(led)" any person or corporation whose racist, gendered, sexist, etc. comments or actions offended a historically marginalized group. Now, Conservatives have framed "cancel culture" as an anti-free speech, socialist agenda promoted by the "Left". To answer the question "What is Cancel Culture?", I trace the term's evolution from its roots in 90s hip-hop culture to its contemporary politicization. In the second chapter, I historicize and contextualize the development of this phenomenon. Finally, I analyze cases of "cancellation" prior to the emergence of "cancel culture" to show that the phenomenon is quite familiar.

THE GLOBAL DIFFUSION OF THE #MeToo MOVEMENT: SNS Usage And Anonymity In Japanese And Korean Feminist Activism



CHIHIRO ISHIKAWA
ADVISOR: PAUL Y. CHANG/TOMIKO YODA (EASD)

ABSTRACT

How has the global diffusion of the #MeToo Movement impacted local organizing among feminist organizations in East Asia? Despite sharing cultural and structural similarities, Japan and South Korea experienced divergent trajectories of #MeToo. I dissect this question into two. First: Why did the #MeToo Movement take on different trajectories in Japan and Korea? Second: How has the global #MeToo Movement reshaped the trajectory of feminist movements in Japan given different anonymity structures across organizations? I conducted 15 interviews and a quantified content analysis of 294 Twitter posts. Findings revealed that feminist activism is a process of constant negotiation with activists' mental health, that #MeToo is a continuation of local efforts and that online anonymity can be partially effective in online activism.

VIRTUAL VERITAS: Harvard Students' Experiences During The Covid-19 Pandemic



ALLISON GRACE LEE
ADVISOR: MANJA KLEMENIC

ABSTRACT

In my study, I investigated how the global pandemic and the shift to remote learning influenced Harvard students': (1) academic experiences and academic behaviors, (2) social life, including extracurricular engagements and interactions, and (3) perceived value of the Harvard degree. To answer these research questions, I interviewed and collected one week of 37 Harvard College students' daily journals. I found four key findings from the data: (1) Students refocused their academic priorities in response to remote learning. (2) Students perceived online classes to be of lower quality than in-person classes. (3) Students were more intentional and purposeful about social interactions. (4) Harvard students perceived their degrees to be of lower value because of missed opportunities due to the pandemic. Future research should focus on the long-term effects of online education in the pandemic on college students.

PERPETUAL ELITISM: An Alternative Explanation for Why Elite Students Get Elite Jobs While Others May Not



LION R. LEE
ADVISOR: ELENA AYALA-HURTADO

ABSTRACT

Recently there has been a surge in sociological literature studying students from elite colleges entering elite professions. These studies largely focus on structural reasons within either recruitment or within the universities for why this phenomenon occurred and continues to perpetuate. This thesis proposes an alternative, class-based explanation whereby the students themselves, due to structural differences in background, self-select into or out of elite professions. This study uses a mixed methods approach (survey and interviews) and covers 13 elite colleges across the United States finding that elite students do have differences in career preference across socioeconomic class.

MOTIVES UNMASKED: Examining What Mask-Wearing Means To Americans During Covid-19



KATHERINE LOU
ADVISOR: SEAN BOCK

ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal: why have face masks been a divisive and partisan issue in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic? Through a novel analysis of Twitter conversation around masks using computational text analysis, I find a mismatch in what pro-mask voices think the other side believes. Pro-mask sentiments condemn 'anti-maskers' for being selfish and holding faulty moral reasoning. However, anti-mask sentiments actually express concerns on the science of masks, rather than moral arguments such as holding liberty to a higher ideal than safety. These findings help further the understanding of political polarization and its empowerment through social media, as well as guidance for public health messaging.

BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE: How South Asian Americans Navigate Faith, Family, and Home-Building in Interfaith Marriages



JAMES A. MATHEW
ADVISOR: DEREK ROBEY

ABSTRACT

This paper uses 18 in-depth interviews with members of 9 interfaith opposite-sex married couples to answer the following research question: How do second-generation South Asian Americans navigate faith, family, and home-building in interfaith marriages? Key findings include: 1) Faith and religion should be treated distinctly to reflect the sample's consensual perspective; 2) Cultural homophily fights with religious homophily for marital priority among South Asian Americans; 3) Increased independence in marital selection suggests a decline in collectivist culture among South Asian Americans; 4) Christian privilege affects the process of interfaith home-building and child-rearing, particularly in couples with one Christian; and 5) A dominant and recessive framework can be applied to future study of child-rearing in interfaith households.

UNPRECEDENTED TIMES, (Un)PRECEDENTED FRIENDS

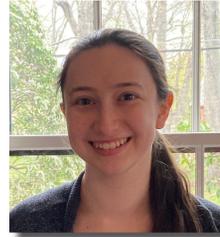


PETER JOSEPH MORRISSEY
ADVISOR: HANNA KATZ

ABSTRACT

People tend to surround themselves with similar others. This phenomenon, known as homophily, has serious implications: it can trap opportunities, resources, and information within uniform, bounded groups. In this study, I compare the level of demographic homophily within high school students' core friendship networks before versus during the COVID-19 pandemic. To do this, I conducted 41 semi-structured interviews at a public high school in Connecticut. My findings reveal that students' core friendship networks were quite demographically homophilous prior to the start of the pandemic, but that COVID-19 has brought about some degree of network diversification. New, cross-cutting relationships have the potential to enhance empathy and inclusion among students.

BETWEEN THE FAMILY AND THE STATE: Responsibility, Authority, And The U.S. Foster Care System



EMILY RACHEL MOSS
ADVISOR: KRISTINA BRANT

ABSTRACT

My thesis examines the U.S. foster care system from an organizational perspective, with a focus on the diffuse structure of the system. Children in foster care typically live in private homes, but they are legally "wards of the state," and a variety of caregivers and professionals share decision-making authority over these children. Through interviews with 27 stakeholders across the system, I sought to understand how this diffuse structure impacts the behavior of these caregivers and professionals, and ultimately the care that foster children receive. I found that the stories my interviewees shared often tied back to confusion and frustration about the allocation of authority across actors. Interviewees commonly described: (1) conflicts with other actors with whom they shared authority; (2) blame being passed among actors, often due to ambiguity about who was most responsible for errors or oversights; and (3) feelings of powerlessness amid a baffling organizational structure. My research ultimately suggests that the diffuse structure of the foster care system may be central to understanding some of the most critical challenges the system faces.

SCOTTISH NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY DURING BREXIT



ELIZABETH OEHLER
ADVISOR: JOSEPH WALLERSTEIN

ABSTRACT

How have Brexit and other major political upheavals impacted national identity among Scottish youth? I employed semi-structured interviews to find that Brexit has shifted young peoples' ideas about their identity, such that they now more commonly classify themselves as Scottish or European rather than British. I also find that COVID-19 has further exacerbated political cleavages, and that support for independence is more potent now than it was in 2014, but young people are still wary of a completely independent Scotland. Young Scots are markedly concerned with ensuring that they live in a thriving democracy, which they do not feel they do, at present, under Westminster. They are also concerned about Scotland's economic future. This work discusses nationalism and identity.

¿QUIENES SOMOS? WHO ARE WE? : The Role of the Iberian in Latinx Identity Conceptualization and Construction



GABRIELA RIVERO
ADVISOR: DEREK ROBEY

ABSTRACT

Using data from 177 survey responses and thirty-five interviews with self-identified Latinxs of Iberian-Latin American ancestry and "full" Latin American ancestry, I examine the role of Spanish ancestry, culture, and colonial history on the conceptualization and construction of Latinx identity. I conclude that Latinx ethnicity exists as a continuum dependent on the degree of possession/lack of various genealogical, cultural, physical, and personal attributes. Due to negative affect towards Spain because of its role as a colonizer, subjects with Iberian ancestry, lighter phenotypes, and lower degrees of "Latin American" cultural attachment often felt and/or were considered by other Latinxs to be "less" Latinx than those that fit the dominant conception of a Latinx person as being of medium phenotype, "purely" Latin American ancestry, and high Latin American cultural attachment. My findings hold important implications for politics, scholarship, and the well-being of self-identified Latinxs.

"WE ARE THE CAPTAINS OF OUR OWN SHIP": Peer Specialists and the Importance of Incorporation as a Social Movement Outcome



EMMA PEARSON SEEVAK
ADVISOR: JOCELYN VITERNA

ABSTRACT

Drawing on historical archives and interviews with 29 peer specialists, my thesis examines the peer specialist workforce. Peer specialists are people with mental health conditions who draw on their personal experiences to support other people with mental health conditions. This new and growing occupation stems from the anti-psychiatry patients' liberation movement of the 1970s. Although most peer specialists work within traditional organizations, they promote many of the original social movement's goals. Existing theory offers few possibilities for how social movements can institutionalize change without being coopted. This thesis presents compelling evidence that a social movement can create lasting change by inserting its core principles and methods into mainstream institutions. I call this process incorporation, which constitutes a critical element of social movement success.

"WE CAN'T ALL BE CLAIRE HUXTABLE": An In-Depth Look At The Embodiment Choices Of Professional African American Women"



LEAH ALEXIA SMART
ADVISOR: ABIGAIL MARIAM

ABSTRACT

Black women are largely underrepresented within corporate leadership. They have an existing, negative historical image within American mainstream culture and exist outside of the stereotypical image of the corporate professional. Given this cultural context, this work attempts to answer the central question of what embodiment choices do Black women in the corporate world make, and how do they perceive their own choices? I found that executive Black women in banking make deliberate embodiment choices across three main categories of embodiment – behavior, hair maintenance, and dress. All adjustments are made to maintain the professional appearance that they believe they must adhere to counteract negative images in the workplace. These women feel that the standard for presentation and work was much higher for them than for their white counterparts. This work has implications for the future of corporate diversity by demonstrating that working in previously closed spaces does not change the cultural understandings of corporate employees.

DRESSING DOWN, LOOKING UP: Unmasking Self-Determination In Student Dress Through The Covid-19 Pandemic



ZACHARY STEIGERWALD SCHNALL
ADVISOR: JOCELYN VITERNA

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how youth sartorial decisions have shifted during an unsettled time, and the implications for boundary work. Through 55 interviews and 371 surveys of three diversified youth clusters in Greater Boston, I find that sartorial autonomy and agency have temporarily expanded during the pandemic, through differentially across race and gender. Boundary work and autonomy operate in a cyclical fashion: as individuals feel constrained in their clothing choice, they increasingly draw boundaries that further constrain others; conversely, as individuals perceive greater control over their attire, boundaries fade, empowering others to dress to their liking. By drawing this conceptual link, findings offer a new vantage point for cultural sociologists to analyze the structural processes undergirding boundary work writ large.