SOCIOLOGY 2015

SENIOR THESIS WRITERS

NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE:
EXPLAINING COLLECTIVE ACTION AMONGST BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF BLACK YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

This study explores what motivated Black college students to engage in collective action following the nationally publicized shootings of Trayvon Martin, Renisha McBride, and Michael Brown. Using semi-structured interviews and surveys from two campuses – Harvard College and Roxbury Community College – I analyze and compare the demographic and qualitative factors from both groups that were important in the students' action or non-action, as well as what forms of resistance and protest were chosen.

Analysis of the data revealed that large-scale theories of collective action, even those focused on Black political behavior, could not account for technological, structural, or emotional factors involved in the response to the publicized shootings. My data points to often contradictory and nuanced motivational factors among students: students felt a sense of duty to act but also felt deeply pessimistic about the efficacy of collective action; they had a strong sense of collective identity, but often engaged in protests for reasons of personal coping.

I explain how new approaches to studying emergent collective action are necessary to capture the increasing complex and multi-layered motivational factors among movement participants.

COLORISM IN CONTEXT:
HOW YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICAN AND SUDANESE WOMEN EXPERIENCE THEIR SKIN COLOR

NAFISA ELFATIH ALI ELTAHIR

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ABSTRACT

Black women in both the United States and Sudan experience colorism on a large scale. In Sudan, colorism manifests most prominently through a widespread trend of skin lightening. There is limited research on colorism in America and no existing literature on colorism in Sudan. Therefore, this thesis aims to augment the literature of both countries by exploring the meaning making and microprocesses involved in colorism, illuminating how and why skin color matters to women and the resulting consequences. In order to do this, I conducted 44 interviews with young college-educated women in Atlanta, Georgia and Khartoum, Sudan over the summer of 2014. I found that skin color takes on a complex web of meanings in both countries, in a way that can best be characterized as a feedback loop. These meanings are transmitted through the media and through skin color "teams". In Sudan, the connection between skin color and racial identity drives the salience of skin color. Contrary to the literature, I found that skin color does not impact young women's identity in a major way in America. In Sudan, however, skin color indicated blackness in a way that was problematic for the darker-skinned women, as it caused them to experience what I term intra-racial racism. There was a general adoption of an African identity among the Sudanese women. In both America and Sudan, the influence of male peers and families is the second driver of the salience of skin color. In Sudan, both groups uphold light skin as desirable because of its racial connotations and their influence proved to be very powerful. These influences cause Sudanese women to resort to skin lightening in order to fit the dominant standard and avoid racist treatment. In America, males similarly preferred light skin, however they were dismissed by the women, whose families de-emphasized skin color as well. Thus, skin lightening was not a salient or necessary option for the American women. Consistent with the literature, Americans were less able to perceive the advantages and disadvantages resulting from skin color than their Sudanese counterparts, for whom there was no illusion of shared outcomes or linked fate. Finally, colorism resulted in an emotional toll on women of all colors in both countries. The comparison of the United States and Sudan allows us to observe the importance of context for the manifestation of colorism. In the all-black Sudanese context, women experience colorism more intensely because of the absence of a historically oppressive majority on whom to place blame. The narrative and history of white oppression mediates the effects of colorism in America.

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS AFFECTING GROUND-LEVEL EXECUTION OF THE K-12 BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM IN THE PHILIPPINES

MICHELLE DENISE L. FERREOL

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the passage of the Enhanced Basic Education Act into Philippine law, schools throughout the Philippines were forced to adopt two additional years of high school into their institutional structure, as well as to enforce a variety of curriculum and instructional changes. The policy effectively transitioned the nation from a 10-year basic education structure to a K-12 system, promising a more globalized curriculum and greater employment opportunities for graduates. This change, however, placed tremendous pressure on teachers and administrators—dubbed by Michael Lipsky (1980) as the "street-level bureaucrats" who execute policies on the ground level— as they were expected to comply with the demands of the law within a limited time period. Thus, in an effort to better understand the ground-level experiences of educators in the aftermath of this policy, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 71 teachers and administrators across four Philippine private schools and five public schools in the National Capital Region. Questions ranged from participants' day-to-day experiences of the implementation process to their attitudes towards the policy itself. These interviews aimed to broadly answer the question: what factors affect the ground-level execution of a newly instituted education policy? Findings revealed that teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and strategies were heavily shaped not only by the immediate needs of their classrooms, but also by a confluence of macro-, meso-, and micro-level structures. This, in turn, affected how they executed their discretion and met their obligations as street-level bureaucrats.

ALL MANKIND OR THE ALL-POWERFUL MARKET?
CLASS AND RACIAL STIGMA AMONG BLACK BARBADIANS

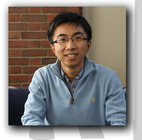
NIMA HASSAN

ADVISOR: CARLY KNIGHT

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I use interview methods to investigate the role of class in shaping black Barbadian experiences with stigma and stigma response. I compare this setting to previously examined national cases (e.g. the United States, France and Brazil) and argue that my research reveals unique aspects of Barbadian stigma response. Namely, that discourse-driven responses shown to vary by national contexts in the literature vary by class in my Barbadian sample. I connect this finding (and other results typologizing Barbadian stigma response) with a variety of literatures.

A PLACE TO CALL HOME:
A QUANTITATIVE AND SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF EVICTIONS IN THE CITY OF BOSTON FROM 2008-2014



TIANHAO HE

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ABSTRACT

The process of eviction is a mechanism that contributes to housing instability, and it is an understudied social phenomenon that increasingly affects the lives of the urban poor in significant ways. This thesis builds an original address-level dataset of all 37,120 eviction cases that were filed in Boston Housing Court in the seven years between 2008 and 2014, a data source that did not exist before. Using this original address-level dataset, this thesis attempts to build a quantitative vocabulary to describe the nature, patterns, and characteristics of eviction as a social phenomenon. I show temporal trends in eviction totals, evictions disaggregated by month of year, and types of eviction cases. I also quantify the asymmetry of legal representation between landlords and tenants in Boston Housing Court, and I show how a select few landlord management companies and landlord attorneys are responsible for a disproportionate share of all eviction cases in Boston. Next, I use ArcMap to quantify the differential distribution of evictions across urban space. I present chloropleths visualizing the distribution of eviction totals by Census block group, prove through a Moran's test for spatial autocorrelation that the clustering of evictions in Boston is statistically significant and not the result of random chance alone, demonstrate through Getis Ord Gi* hotspot analyses that there is a statistically significant clustering of high-eviction block groups in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. Finally, I conduct a basic Poisson regression and preliminarily find that eviction counts at the block group level are related in a statistically significant way to aggregate crime counts, proportion of African Americans, proportion of Hispanics, the unemployment rate, and number of households making less than $25,000 a year. Methodologically, it is my hope that this thesis contributes to the research literature by showing a novel way in which GIS and maps can tell the story of a social phenomenon and in which spatial statistics can be used to quantify and understand the role of eviction as it relates to urban poverty.

NAVIGATING MOTHERHOOD IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ELITE MOTHERS WHO OPT OUT, CONTINUE WORKING OR PARENT ALONE

BRENNA JEAN HILFERTY

ADVISOR: FILIZ GARIP

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the factors impacting financially- secure elite mothers' choices to opt out, to continue working or to parent alone and then examines how these choices influence the division of labor in the home and the way in which the mothers experience internal and external judgment. First the thesis assesses established literature and identifies key theories; it then assesses the theories in relation to the experiences of study participants. Data comes from 22 in-depth interviews with elite mothers from the Greater Boston area selected through a snowball sample. The thesis confirms some of the established theories but differentiates their applicability to the categories of mothers and identifies needed revisions. It challenges other theories as not applicable. Regarding the choice to opt out, continue working or parent alone, most mothers ignored the Evolutionary Psychology perspective and instead subscribed to the Kaleidoscopic Career Model's emphasis on balance. However, the theory, specifically its definition of balance, needs to be modified in order to encompass the experiences of all categories of elite mothers. In regards to division of labor, the majority of mothers dismissed the biological explanation and instead employed either resource allocation or a fusion of resource allocation and cultural norms. Finally, mothers operated within competing paradigms for the ideal mother: intensive mothering and supermom. Mothers generally felt judged more for their career decisions than for their mothering practices. The findings provide insight into a growing segment of mothers and are important not only for the women and their families but also for workplaces looking to recruit and retain skilled professional women.

SISSIES OR SOLDIERS?
SEXUAL STIGMA AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN THE PUTOS PERONISTAS MOVEMENT

TAONGA LESLIE

ADVISOR: DANILO MANDIC

ABSTRACT

My thesis explores the framing strategies used by stigmatized groups to defend their participation in larger social movements and argue for inclusion in the collective identity of their groups. I specifically examine the Putos Peronistas, a hybrid-identity organization of queer participants in Argentina's Peronist movement. I find that the Putos emphasize the contributions of queer participants to the Peronist movement, and the contributions of Peronist leaders to the queer community, while distancing themselves from queer people outside the movement and de-emphasizing conflicts with Peronist leaders. The movement also reframes their experience of sexual stigma as a mark of solidarity and courage. In doing so, the group draws on both positive and negative stereotypes about queer people. This project contributes to theories of collective identity, symbolic boundaries, sexual identity and national identity.

BETWEEN THE RATCHET AND THE RIGHTEOUS:
THE PERFORMANCE OF RACE ONLINE AND THE EMERGENCE OF BLACK TWITTER

ZAKIYA SHANI LEWIS

ADVISOR: JASMIN SANDELSON

ABSTRACT

Young black Internet users have remarkably higher rates of Twitter use than their white counterparts (Smith, 2014). Consequently, "Black Twitter" has recently emerged as an influential, semi-public collective of individuals, with a unique discursive style and a disposition toward inter-connected discussions of culturally relevant topics. The aim of this study is to answer two research questions: 1) What form does the performance of race online take, and what informs this performance? and 2) How are the specific features of Twitter used to foster a semi-bounded community known as Black Twitter? To explore these questions, I conducted 18 qualitative interviews with black Twitter users at Harvard University. My findings suggest that these students' performances of racial identity are largely influenced by traditions of black culture, and are manifested in their use of language, style of humor, and inclusion of black cultural references in their tweets. Respondents also indicate that the specific features of Twitter, especially hashtags, trending topics, and retweets, have helped create and reaffirm feelings of community and belonging on Black Twitter, while increasing the reach and visibility of the practices of its members. Moreover, the students suggest that the emergence of Black Twitter as a space for the performance of blackness has proven to have a significant impact on black culture offline, especially in regards to the social awareness of members of the black community.

WHO PAYS A MOTHERHOOD WAGE PENALTY?
THE ROLE OF JOB CHANGE AND EMPLOYMENT GAPS

IAN LUNDBERG

SOCIOLOGY ADVISOR: ALEXANDRA KILLEWALD
STATISTICS ADVISOR: LUKE MIRATRIX

ABSTRACT

It is well-established that the birth of a first child is associated with reductions in women's hourly wages. In this paper, I argue that the motherhood wage penalty only occurs after women experience their first post-birth job change with an employment gap. Prior research has established employment gaps as one factor related to the motherhood wage penalty. However, this literature has focused on the residual wage penalty or lack thereof conditional on employment gaps or among women who remain highly attached to paid labor. The focus on those with consistent employment histories misdirects attention away from the mothers who suffer the most severe penalties. This paper is the first to explicitly evaluate the motherhood wage penalty among those with inconsistent employment patterns following a first birth. Rather than treating these gaps as a confounding factor, I analyze them as a primary mechanism by which motherhood reduces women's wages. I find a motherhood wage penalty of about 20% after women change jobs with an employment gap, compared with no effect prior to an employment gap. These results shed light on the process that links motherhood to wage losses and highlight the large wage penalty paid by the women whose careers are most disrupted by motherhood.

PUTTING DOWN THE KOOL-AID:
EXAMINING MYTHMAKING AND DISSONANCE IN THE COWORKING SPACE

KIKO ADELINE PORTÉ

ADVISOR: MATT KALINER

ABSTRACT

The late 2000s have seen the emergence of a new kind of workplace: the coworking space. To date, little has been written about these "third spaces," and the existing literature focuses on situating the phenomenon within the theory of the creative, urban economy. Coworking spaces are regarded as innovation hubs, designed to host creative people and entrepreneurs to break isolation and come together to exchange ideas and collaborate. However, it appears this idealized representation is fostered by managers of the space and legitimized through a set of rationalized institutional rules. This study focuses on explaining coworking through the theory of institutionalized organizations and explores the realities of the coworking space on the ground. Data were collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with members and managers of coworking spaces, as well as design architects. The efficiency and effectiveness of coworking spaces deserve to be questioned, and the future value and importance of coworking spaces will be examined in this thesis.

FASHION, FINANCE, AND FIT:
DESIGNER INTERVIEW CLOTHES AND CULTURAL MATCHING IN INVESTMENT BANKING

SAMANTHA LYNN RACHESKY

ADVISOR: CHRISTY LEY

ABSTRACT

Despite making substantial gains toward wage parity over the past 50 years, among full-time, year-round workers, women still earn less than 80 cents for every dollar earned by men. Access to well-paid, male-dominated elite jobs remains a key obstacle to income and economic equality. In investment banking, women make out a disproportionately low proportion of new hires, and a very small fraction of senior officers and managers. This study seeks consider the puzzle of investment bank hiring while contributing to the literature on how clothing contributes to evaluations of job applicants—especially women—by introducing the expense of interview clothing as a new variable. I theorized that any effect attributable to expensive interview outfits will be more pronounced for women than for men. The results support this hypothesis, indicating that designer clothing has a small but significant positive effect on the likelihood that female investment-banking job applicants will receive a job offer.

FOR HIS KINGDOM:
CHURCH, CAPITAL, AND COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEXT OF POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

JAMES STEVENSON RAMSEY

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ABSTRACT

There is significant literature on quality of life measurements for communities, and there is significant theoretical literature on the nature of individual interactions. However, there is little research on the relationship between the two; that is, how micro-level, interpersonal interactions lead to greater community change. This thesis seeks to explain how individual, small-scale interactions, conceptualized in large part by the capital theories of Pierre Bourdieu, lead to tangible effects on community quality of life.

In the context of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, churches played a huge role in recovery efforts, especially in New Orleans (Sparks 2008). Therefore, using intensive, semi-structured interviews with 10 church officials, each from a different, underserved neighborhood in the city, I show the relationship between churches' Bourdieuian capital interactions and community change. My study takes place in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana in the context of post-Katrina developments, specifically focusing on communities hard-hit by the storm, which allows us better insight into the relationship between Bourdieuian capital forms, disaster, and community life. I find that churches manipulate these Bourdieuian forms of capital through capital additions, exchanges, and transformations to and with the community and that these capital manipulations lead to tangible community change. These findings hold implications for methods of effective philanthropic intervention in troubled neighborhoods.

EXANDING THE ALPHABET OF HIV/AIDS INTERVENTIONS:
UNDERSTANDING MAASAI CULTURE AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR AWARENESS AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES

SERGIO ANDRES SEGRERA

ADVISOR: MARY-JO DELVECCHIO GOOD

ABSTRACT

Despite targeted awareness programs, the HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to spread among pastoral tribes, including the Maasai. Traditional HIV prevention programs have proven incompatible within the Maasai cultural context, and have been unable to bridge the HIV/AIDS knowledge and behavior change gap. My investigation fills this void in quantitative and qualitative information through the collection and analyses of data obtained from 150 interviews with Maasai men and women. The risk of HIV infection is amplified for the tribe as a whole by way of virtual ignorance; non-use of condoms; customary polygynous practices; a lack of accurate information regarding HIV/AIDS; and widely held stigmatized and discriminatory attitudes toward those living with HIV/AIDS. In addition, various culturally entrenched practices and gender norms exacerbate the inequity between Maasai men and women, ultimately placing females at greater risk for infection with HIV. The misdirection of HIV/AIDS educational efforts, like the ABC sexual transmission model, elucidates the need for the redesign and implementation of programs that accurately assess the context of the target population. Allowing ignorance and misinformation in these matters to go unaddressed would ensure catastrophe for the Maasai community; thus, culturally sensitive health programs to educate these vulnerable populations about HIV/AIDS are required. However, without in-depth information of the cultural customs that define the Maasai people, it is difficult to instill any sustainable change towards their beliefs and perceptions of the virus. Although Maasai cultural values and social structures differ from the majority of the Tanzanian population, there are many possible avenues for effective and acceptable HIV prevention strategies. In order to implement a comprehensive and highly interactive HIV prevention program focused on making current behaviors less risky, there must be an appropriate assessment of the cultural context of the target population, an end to which this study accomplished.

FAMILY LIFE AFTER INCARCERATION IN THE BOSTON REENTRY STUDY

NATALIE I. SMITH

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VES ADVISOR: ROBB MOSS

ABSTRACT

In the contemporary United States, it is estimated that 2.5 million minor children have an incarcerated parent. Mirroring the demographic stratification of imprisonment, the likelihood of parental incarceration is greatest for the children of young, black men with little formal education. Surveying children as focal respondents allows researchers to explore the consequences of parents' imprisonment indirectly by measuring children's outcomes; however, these studies cannot explain how going to prison affects how men and women think about and enact "what it means to be a parent." In my senior thesis, I draw upon data from the 2012 Boston Reentry Study (BRS) to explore how incarceration comes to shape family life. The BRS employs a longitudinal panel design that surveys 122 men and women who have recently been released from state prisons for neighborhoods in the Boston area. Due to the unique design of the BRS, I am able to explore quantitatively and qualitatively how people who have experienced imprisonment define themselves as parents and manage relationships with the children in their lives during the first year following prison release.

In my quantitative chapter, I argue that the complex living arrangements of many formerly incarcerated people provide a compelling reason to revise the traditional idea of "parenthood" to include relationships with non-biological and adult children. I find that parents' contact with children – biological and non-biological, adult and minor – increases rapidly in the first few months in the community. Demographic characteristics such as age and race are not statistically significant predictors of contact post-release; rather parents with a history of mental illness and drug addiction have significantly less contact with children, while parents who were in contact with children while in prison are much more likely to be in contact after release. The qualitative chapter uses narrative case studies to explore these themes in greater detail.

Taken together, the results of my analysis indicate a need to rethink the way we conceptualize family complexity for formerly incarcerated parents and their children. Parental contact varies greatly and is not simply indexed by a parent's residence in the family home. Relationships of adult guardianship and support also extend beyond those with biological children. While causal effects of incarceration on family complexity may be difficult to identify, incarceration is clearly a new and important dimension of the family life for the poor in shaping how parent-child relationships are defined and managed. In this way, incarceration further differentiates the experience of family life in low-income, black and Hispanic communities from that in wealthier, whiter segments of American society. Policy recommendations directed towards reducing the social harms of imprisonment are considered in the conclusion.

INERTIA AND INNOVATION AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

TERESA YAN

ADVISOR: MATT KALINER

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores two puzzles concerning institutional innovation and inertia. First, although sociological theory holds that organizations change and adapt more efficient and rational methods over time empirical research contradictorily shows that organizations must also adopt short-term inefficiencies in the form of experimentation for long-term survival. Second, although organizations are capable of radical changes, change rarely manifests in such a manner. Instead, observers and onlookers note the subtle, incremental changes that occur, which, through a little studied process, accumulate to enact large organizational changes.

In light of these two puzzles, I utilize a case study of the British Museum to examine how museum staff members understand and enact organizational change. Through a mixture of qualitative methods, namely participant observation, in-depth interviews and archival research, I address my second organizational puzzle, arguing that radical organizational change arose from lessons learned from seemingly subtle, incremental experimentation in the Museum's experimental space, Room 3. I demonstrate changes are not subtle nor incremental for those internal to the Museum—and in fact require enormous shifts in understanding of staff members' visitor behavior and expectations.

I turn to my first organizational puzzle by examining the bureaucratization of experimentation in the Museum. Although experimentation has naturally become rationalized in Room 3, I argue that the needs and function of the room demand irrational and inefficient actions be performed in it. Indeed, as demonstrated in the 2014 display, "Dressed to impress: netsuke and Japanese men's fashion," staff members still perform experimentation in the Museum to align occasionally contradictory missions in the Museum.