Community Research Program Abstracts

An Exploratory Study of Southeast Asian Acculturation Differences and How it Affects Parental Expression of Affection.
Youy Ou, Lynch School '15
Advisor: Prof. Oh Myo Kim

The aim of this exploratory study was to explore how acculturation might influence expressions of affection between parent and child for Southeast Asian American college students. Studies find that the higher the difference in acculturation, the more potential for conflict resulting in higher rates of distress. Six Southeast Asian American students were asked to fill out measures of acculturation and participate in semi-structured interviews. The findings suggest that cultural differences influence the expression of affection. However some participants offered insight into how traditional "non-American" expressions of love can both positively and negatively influence a child's well-being. The data from this study can inform mental health providers about the ways in which cultural differences due to acculturation impact family relationships.

Latino Men and their Support Networks
Maria Vazquez, Lynch School '15
Advisor: Prof. Audrey Friedman

Latino men, although just as likely to experience psychological distress as Latino women, exhibit some of the lowest rates mental health service access among ethnic and racial minorities. This study relied on interviews with four ethnically diverse, college-aged, self-identified Latino men in the Boston area to explore their academic, social, and emotional support networks—how and why they seek support, what they consider to be important in those relationships, and perceptions of effectiveness. Analysis of the interview data found reciprocity, trust, honesty, and consistency to be especially relevant to Latino men in their most successful and effective support networks. Contrary to the literature, masculinity proved to be a more significant factor than common cultural/ethnic experience in choice of support.

Care Workers Perceptions of Post-Incarceration and the Social Effects on Black Men's Health
Gaetan Civil, A&S '15
Advisor: Prof. Martin Summers

Research has shown that black males have higher poor health outcomes than other populations. Moreover, the U.S. currently has the highest rate of incarceration, and black males have been disproportionally represented in this group. Interviews with care workers of former black inmates indicated several socio-contextual factors of post-incarceration influencing access to and affordability of health care and black men's health outcomes: lack of marketable job skills and limited job prospects; substandard housing; increased stress related to readjustment to family and home life; and isolation and stigma from society. While social policies must address ways to better integrate the formerly incarcerated into society, these care workers also indicated the need for reform within the health care industry to improve transitional care.

Formal Mentoring Programs and Latina Adolescent Mental Health
Stephanie Hardy, A&S '15
Advisor: Prof. Paul Chichello

This mixed methods study explored the impact of mentoring on mental health outcomes of high school youth in an inner city with a special focus on Latina adolescents. Drawing on secondary data from a city's Youth Risk Behavior Study, the deductive portion of the study used quantitative econometric methods and confirmed my hypothesis that mentoring positively impacts mental health outcomes related to body image, depression, self-harm, and suicide. Confirming the data, qualitative interviews with Latina youth participating in a city's community organization revealed that formal mentoring can make a substantial difference in the lives of at-risk youth.

My Black Identity-Social Constructions of Racial Identity within a School Context
Lakeisha St. Joy, A&S '15
Advisor: Prof. Patrick Proctor

This research was an exploration of how the school context influences the construction of racial identity among Black youth. This qualitative, inductive study used the methods of drawing and focus group interviewing with 5th grade students enrolled in an urban after school tutoring program. The findings of this study revealed two reoccurring themes (1) that black identity is not innate, but learned and (2) that you do not have to be white or act white to succeed. Students indicated that black teachers "teach us something different" and that having a black teacher can help because "they already know about my culture so they know my needs and everything. "The relevance of school in the formation of identity provides an important perspective because what we learn in school greatly influences how we perceive ourselves and potential. More needs to be done in order to diversify the teaching staff at our urban schools. Although most students stated that all teachers teach you something, students clearly express a desire for the exposure to Black teachers.

Exploring Asian American Professional Women's Opportunities for Advancement in the Financial Industry
Ting Xu, CSOM '15
Advisor: Prof. Judith Gordon

Asian American professional women are a growing force in today's labor market, but they have received little attention in the field of research and not much is known about their career experiences. This interview-based study aimed to learn how these women interpret their experiences working in a professional industry and how they assess their opportunities for advancement. The findings show that Asian American professional women experience difficulty in moving up in their careers, mainly because of perceived and real gender and racial discrimination, which leads them not only to work harder than expected in order to be promoted. Corporations need more reform to lessen the effect of male-dominated, white culture in order to create a more inclusive workplace.

Athletics vs. Academics: A Study on the Relationship between Sports and Academics for Latino Male High School Students
Francisco Bernard, A&S '15
Advisor: Michael Malec

Within the United States, Latinos have the lowest percentage of academic achievement compared to other racial groups. While many researchers have examined the academic achievement gap, this study took a different approach and explored the relationship between athletics and academics. It is well known that athletics is an avenue into college, but Latinos only account for 4.3% of college athletes compared to 15.2% Black students and 73.8% White students. Through surveys of 58 Latino college students, this study examined if sports participation increased academic and social success among Latinos. Findings indicated that sports participation increased their academic performance and provided skills such as high work ethic, sociability, and motivation, variables that the literature did not emphasize.

The Role of Effective Communication in the Academic Success of Somali Refugee Students
Veronica Glennon, A&S '15
Advisor: Deborah Piatelli

How are communicative and cultural differences influencing parent/teacher/student relationships and academic performance for Somali refugee students in an urban public school system? As a result of Somali civil war, thousands of Somali refugee children experience unique difficulties within the U.S., including preliteracy, discrimination, and dissonant acculturation with parents. Literature has shown these issues often result in poor academic achievement. Through a demographics survey and inductive interviews with Somali refugee parents whose children attend Boston public schools, findings revealed that a combination of severe misunderstanding and miscommunication can play an immense role in hindering Somali students' academic success. Among these: parents' lack of knowledge of ELL resources and the American school system, teachers' unawareness about their students' backgrounds, and students' challenges to balance traditional Somali values with American ideals. The findings can be utilized by schools and community organizations to promote teacher cultural competency and stronger relationships with parents and students.

Beauty Ideals and Its Implications on Sexual Behavior Amongst African-American Women
Catherine Gurrier, A&S '14
Advisor: Amy Tishelman

In a survey conducted by the CDC, new data revealed that black women continue to be far more affected by HIV than women of other social groups. This study investigated psychological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal factors that could increase Black college-aged women's risk for heterosexually transmitted HIV infection. Thirty-two Black college-aged women participated in the online study. They completed the following self-report measures: a demographic form; the Physical Features Inventory (PFI); the Self-Esteem Scale (SES); the Relational Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) the Silencing the Self Scale (SSS); the Sexual Risk Survey Scale (SRSS); and the Condom Use Self-Efficacy Scale (CUSES). Analysis of the data revealed that there is a link between perception of beauty, how it is internalized and its effects on sexual risk-taking among Black college-aged women. This research suggests that is essential to concentrate on strategies to increase self-esteem, redefine beauty standards, desires for intimacy, and promote the eroticization of condoms.

The Evangelical Church and How It Supports Its Latino Community
Dario Hernandez, A&S '15
Advisor: Gustavo Morello

Latino membership within the Evangelical church is growing at a fast rate throughout Latin America and the United States. Literature suggests that these churches provide support that is more relevant to the lives of this population than other churches. Through inductive interviews, this study explored how an Evangelical church supports its Latino members: legally, educationally and socially. The findings revealed an interesting sense of community that was divided by regional areas of the state, where members were assigned to a House of Blessing where they would be supported and cared for both spiritually and personally. The focus of the ministries was geared towards the family and personal growth with a strong sense of support and guidance. Members interviewed felt improvement could be made in how the Church conducts outreach and its involvement in activism and community affairs. This research can be used to improve support given to Latinos in our community by their most trusted community organization, the church.

Nutritional Knowledge and Dietary Choices of Latinos in a Metropolitan, Lower Income Community
Claudia Mazariegos, A&S '15
Advisor: Deborah Piatelli

High rates of obesity exist within the U.S. Latino population that can lead to poor health. This study examined how nutrition education influenced the eating habits of a subset of this population. Survey data was collected from thirty-five Latino parents that had at least one child that is medically overweight and enrolled in a nutritional education program. Contrary to the literature, the findings suggested that there is not a significant correlation between healthier eating habits and nutritional knowledge. Participants that read nutrition labels were more likely to consume fruit and eat less junk food, but vegetable consumption and other healthy food choices were lower than recommended by the medical profession. This data could inform health programs as education alone is not enough to change dietary behavior.

The Impact of Family Meals on dietary choices and active lifestyles of Latinos in a Metropolitan, Lower Income Community
Karla Mazariegos, A&S '15
Advisor: Deborah Piatelli

Levels of obesity and diabetes within the Latino U.S. population have been increasing due to many factors, including a lack of a healthy lifestyle. Family meals have been found by many researchers to have a positive impact on the dietary choices of a person, but also it also has been linked to the amount of activity in one's life. This study examined how family meals impacted the dietary choices and activity levels within a Spanish speaking population in East Boston. Survey data was collected from thirty-five Latino parents that had at least one child that is medically overweight and enrolled in a nutritional education program. Findings indicate that family meals had no correlation with activity level, but did impact healthy dietary choices to some degree.

Latinos In High School: Factors That Affect Their Decisions on College
Stefan Sandoval, CSOM '16
Advisor: Ana Martinez-Aleman

There are many factors that affect Latino youth in their educational decisions including socio-economic status, acculturation, and family obligations. Through survey and interview methods of 39 youth, this study explored the factors that influence at-risk Latino youth on their decisions about going to college. This question is important because of the low educational attainment rate for Latinos in this country. Parents are usually the ones who encourage the students to go to college and peers are the ones who don't. Interestingly enough, there were a number of students that stated that their parents were the ones influencing them not to go to college. All of the students wanted to go to college, however around half felt as if they needed to stay home due to family obligations. The findings of this study can be used by different organizations that help youth make decisions about their futures and help justify funding needs for these organizations.

The African American Public High School Experience and Influences on Academic Achievement
Cusaj Thomas, A&S '15
Advisor: Andrew Beauchamp

Compared to their white counterparts and African American females, African American males are performing at alarmingly low rates educationally, both at the high school and college level. This research study examined the influence of poverty and the student –teacher relationship on academic goals of African American males. Findings suggest that African American males may perform better academically and have higher achievement goals when paired with a teacher of their same race and gender and even better if the teacher expressed interest in the student and their goals. Further, these correlations are slightly strengthened when introducing a variable measuring poverty.

CRP Projects: AY2012-2013

Perceptions of mental healthcare in African and African American women
Alberta Adu, A&S '14, Biology
Advisor: Alyssa Harris

Research indicates that racial and ethnic minorities such as African Americans (and African immigrants) lack access to healthcare, are often misdiagnosed, receive inadequate care overall and are less likely to receive treatment for depression. In this study, a qualitative descriptive method was used to develop an understanding of the perceptions of mental healthcare in African and African American women and how it affects their decisions to utilize mental health care resources. Findings generated from a focus group of five women indicate that cultural and religious beliefs can play an important role in shaping understandings of mental health and treatment options. More community-based education about mental health could help alleviate barriers to seeking care for this population.

Guns, gangs and growing pains: The impact of gun and gang violence on Cape Verdean youth
Rayana M. Grace, A&S '13, Sociology
Advisor: Betsy Leonder-Wright

According to the Children's Defense Fund, one teen every three hours dies from gun violence, and black teens account for forty-five percent of those deaths. As Congress debates gun control, urban centers focus on curbing the growing rate of gang-related and firearm homicides occurring in their cities. This study examined the impact of gun and gang violence on the lives of Cape Verdean youth living in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Through personal interviews with four Cape Verdeans, the findings revealed that youth are subject to being drawn into generational, territorial battles that often result in declining association with education, stress, and delinquency. Despite these constraints, those youth involved in after school programs or are afforded the opportunity to attend schools with more resources are able to overcome these challenges. Youth suggest community policing, more job opportunities, and stricter gun control laws are needed in their communities.

Youths' Perception of a Community Youth Center
Jon Huang, A&S '14, Economics
Advisor: Vincent Cho

Studies have shown that Asian Americans are underrepresented in many leadership positions in American society. Research also has shown that Asian American students have lower participation in civic life and in the school environment. Through observation and interviews, this study explored Asian youths' perceptions of and experiences with a leadership program within a community youth center. The findings show that offering youth the opportunity to mentor and work closely with others contributed to their overall sense of confidence in both their academic and social lives. While schools should provide more opportunities for youth to participate in leadership activities, this study emphasizes the importance of funding community centers where youth can further develop important life skills and connect with others.

Stuck in limbo: Balancing dominant and non-dominant capital
Steven T. Jefferson, A&S '14, Sociology
Advisor: Lisa Patel Stevens

In investigating the educational racial gap, research has shown that a correlation exists between racial identity and academic achievement and that the school context has a significant effect on a student's' racial identity. Moreover, scholars suggest that students of color must learn to negotiate spaces of dominant and non-dominant cultural capital in order to achieve academic success. Through interviews, this inductive study explored how six African American college students reflect upon their racial identity development and academic experiences during their high school years. The findings suggest an awareness of the necessity of acquiring 'white dominant cultural capital' to succeed, but attribute these behaviors in the context of 'redefining blackness.' Moreover, participants experience difficulty in defining black culture as it relates to their racial identity. This study raises questions as to the implications of a declining awareness of and identification with a black cultural identity.

Language learning, cultural identity and acculturation: Korean college students reflections and interpretations of their experiences in a Korean language school
Min Hyeong Ki, A&S '15, International Studies
Advisor: Ted Youn

Korean schools have played an important role in fostering cultural identity maintenance linking heritage language and cultural identity development in young adults. This inductive study explored how Korean schools might address the challenges Korean children may face with the acculturation process and development of their cultural identity. Interviews were conducted with four second-generation Korean college students who attended different Korean schools and observations were conducted in one Korean school in New England. The findings suggest that parents' acculturation and school teaching methods both influence how youth experience their cultural identity. Additionally, students expressed the importance of being engaged in a 'cultural community' that was not being created outside the school through their family interactions. This data can inform teachers who are currently engaged in Korean language schools.

Perceptions of the racial achievement gap and efforts to address it
Alicia L. McKean, LSOE '15, Applied Psychology and Human Development
Advisor: Lauri Johnson

This research explored how educational professionals working in racially diverse schools in Massachusetts cities view the racial achievement gap and efforts to address it. Using data from interviews with six teachers and administrators, this study examined how participants see the racial achievement gap in their school and what practices they believe to be the most effective in combating it. The findings revealed that teachers and administrators acknowledge how racism shapes students' academic experience in a variety of ways including course selection, disciplinary actions, and relationships with faculty. Findings also indicated that cultural competency training for teachers and community partnerships are two practices that are thought to have the potential to reduce the racial achievement gap in schools.

South Asian female identity development and the implications towards domestic abuse
Naomi Parikh, LSOE '13, Human Development
Advisor: Kalpana Rahita Seshadri

Research has shown the alarming prevalence of domestic abuse within the South Asian community, but research on effective outreach methods within the South Asian context is scarce. This study explored the process of identity development through in-depth interviews with four college-aged South Asian women to better understand how gender, culture, and acculturation influence their views on their role in intimate relationships and their thoughts on issues of domestic violence. The findings indicate that these acculturated, college-aged women resist traditional gender norms, but seek to integrate aspects of their cultural identity with a stronger sense of empowerment suggesting that acculturation and social class influences one's interaction within intimate relationships. South Asian domestic abuse needs to be addressed in a unique and cultured manner in order to provide victims with the best possible outreach and preventative methods.

CLAS implementation in health centers
Devika Patel, A&S '13, Biology
Advisor: Rosanna Demarco

Cultural competency is an important aspect of a health center's attempts to provide quality care and access to services. In 2000, the Office of Minority Health created the Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards to address these needs nationally. Though much literature exists on the need for cultural competency in healthcare, there is a gap in the literature on the strategies actually used to implement these standards. This study examined data collected from community health centers by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) in an attempt to assess the implementation of these standards. Findings indicate that centers are implementing culturally competent practices in three primary areas: language access, adequate training of healthcare providers, and recruiting and maintaining a diverse staff that represents the communities being served. This data prompted a revision of the current MDPH standards to include attention to the needs of transgender communities.

Culture and the Cape: A case study of Cape Wind and cultural preservation
Mehreen Rahman, A&S '13, Political Science
Advisor: Andrew Tirrell

This inductive case study examined the challenges in resolving the tension between historical/cultural preservation and renewable energy development in the context of the "Cape Wind" case, America's first offshore wind farm. Through examination of legal documents and informal interviews with representatives from federal, state, and tribal governments, as well as community members, this case illustrated the need for specific legal guidelines in regard to tribal sovereignty over land and more proactive involvement of Native American voices on land-management decisions that might adversely affect tribal culture and land rights. It is an example of broader concerns for natural resource development, consultation, and cultural resources.

Massachusetts' Native Americans and Romneycare: Motives and outcomes
G. Patrick Regan, A&S '14, Political Science
Advisor: Peter Skerry

The individual health insurance mandate was the most controversial element of both the 2010 Affordable Care Act and its 2006 Massachusetts predecessor. However, the Massachusetts legislature decided a medical care program of the Indian Health Service or of a tribal organization counted as credible coverage, exempting the state's Native Americans from the insurance requirement. What avenues did Native Americans use to secure this exception? How has the law impacted insurance coverage and costs for this population? An analysis of secondary data collected by the state revealed an increase in coverage from 82% insured in 2005 to 85% in 2009, better than the national average of 70% for the Native American population. Interviews with representatives from state and tribal governments indicated that Native American voices were integrated into the mandate exception through a nuanced lobbying process and this has resulted in increased tribal sovereignty over healthcare spending.

Latino immigrant parent perceptions of bilingual education: Reasons for enrolling or not enrolling children in bilingual programs
Natali Soto, CSOM 14, Economics
Advisor: Patrick Procotor

The merits of bilingual education within the United States continue to be heavily debated. Although research has shown that bilingual education programs provide social and cognitive benefits to students, Latino parents often hesitate to enroll their children in bilingual programs. This project aimed to discover parents' reasons for choosing to enroll or not enroll their children. Interviews were conducted with four middle-class Latino immigrant parents who had the option of enrolling their children in bilingual or monolingual programs. Findings indicated that parents enroll their children because of their belief in the importance of maintaining heritage, increasing cultural capital, and preserving family cohesion. Parents also explained they did not enroll their children because of their fear of stigma and discrimination and desire to assimilate into American society. Policy makers and school districts need to be aware of these reasons and hesitations in their outreach efforts to Latino families so parents and guardians are well informed about the many benefits of bilingual education programs and can take advantage of them for their children.

Cultural competency in mental healthcare in the Asian American community
Oanh T. Tran, A&S '14, Psychology
Advisor: Julie AnhAllen

This research attempted to identify the role cultural competency plays in psychologists' work with Chinese Americans seeking mental health. Cultural competency is an important aspect that is becoming more recognized in the field of health care that is essential for the interactions between a provider and a patient and is the foundation for quality health care. Several psychologists and clinicians were interviewed for their perspectives on the significance of cultural competency in their field of work and what cultural competency encompasses. Participants propose similar perspectives of cultural competency such as language, cultural sensitivity, and adapting to culturally and individually unique needs of patients. Findings indicate that practitioners must be aware of how stigma and mis-education on issues of mental health influence this population. More community-based education about mental health could help alleviate barriers to seeking care for this population.

Academic Achievement & the bicultural experience of Haitian youth
Jemima Victor, LSOE '15, Applied Psychology and Human Development
Advisor: Mariela Paez

Research suggests that immigrant youth experience difficulty acculturating to the American education system and this has an impact on their academic performance. This inductive study explored how Haitian college students navigate the cultural landscape in an American higher education context and how their experience as Haitian students impacts their academic experience. In-depth interviews were conducted with second generation Haitian college students. The findings indicate that in predominately white educational spaces, students felt the need to overcome negative stereotypes attributed to their cultural identity in order to succeed and experienced difficulty expressing their spirituality in peer groups. Results from this study could assist those developing cultural competency programs for teachers working with immigrant youth.

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CRP Projects AY 2013-2014

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Youths' perception of a community youth center
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Alicia L. McKean, LSOE '15, Applied Psychology and Human Development
Advisor: Lauri Johnson

This research explored how educational professionals working in racially diverse schools in Massachusetts cities view the racial achievement gap and efforts to address it. Using data from interviews with six teachers and administrators, this study examined how participants see the racial achievement gap in their school and what practices they believe to be the most effective in combating it. The findings revealed that teachers and administrators acknowledge how racism shapes students' academic experience in a variety of ways including course selection, disciplinary actions, and relationships with faculty. Findings also indicated that cultural competency training for teachers and community partnerships are two practices that are thought to have the potential to reduce the racial achievement gap in schools.

South Asian female identity development and the implications towards domestic abuse
Naomi Parikh, LSOE '13, Human Development
Advisor: Kalpana Rahita Seshadri

Research has shown the alarming prevalence of domestic abuse within the South Asian community, but research on effective outreach methods within the South Asian context is scarce. This study explored the process of identity development through in-depth interviews with four college-aged South Asian women to better understand how gender, culture, and acculturation influence their views on their role in intimate relationships and their thoughts on issues of domestic violence. The findings indicate that these acculturated, college-aged women resist traditional gender norms, but seek to integrate aspects of their cultural identity with a stronger sense of empowerment suggesting that acculturation and social class influences one's interaction within intimate relationships. South Asian domestic abuse needs to be addressed in a unique and cultured manner in order to provide victims with the best possible outreach and preventative methods.

CLAS implementation in health centers
Devika Patel, A&S '13, Biology
Advisor: Rosanna Demarco

Cultural competency is an important aspect of a health center's attempts to provide quality care and access to services. In 2000, the Office of Minority Health created the Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards to address these needs nationally. Though much literature exists on the need for cultural competency in healthcare, there is a gap in the literature on the strategies actually used to implement these standards. This study examined data collected from community health centers by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) in an attempt to assess the implementation of these standards. Findings indicate that centers are implementing culturally competent practices in three primary areas: language access, adequate training of healthcare providers, and recruiting and maintaining a diverse staff that represents the communities being served. This data prompted a revision of the current MDPH standards to include attention to the needs of transgender communities.

Culture and the Cape: A case study of Cape Wind and cultural preservation
Mehreen Rahman, A&S '13, Political Science
Advisor: Andrew Tirrell

This inductive case study examined the challenges in resolving the tension between historical/cultural preservation and renewable energy development in the context of the "Cape Wind" case, America's first offshore wind farm. Through examination of legal documents and informal interviews with representatives from federal, state, and tribal governments, as well as community members, this case illustrated the need for specific legal guidelines in regard to tribal sovereignty over land and more proactive involvement of Native American voices on land-management decisions that might adversely affect tribal culture and land rights. It is an example of broader concerns for natural resource development, consultation, and cultural resources.