Dear fellow graduate students: I hope you are having a wonderful year. SPSSI has always been a unique division of APA due to its focus on current social issues and its willingness to create positive social change around the world. SPSSI seeks to synergize theory and practice to help bring solutions and resolutions to current human problems that exist not only in groups and communities, but nations, as well. This issue of the Rookie Newsletter tries to contribute to that mission by offering refreshing new articles that bring to life the work of SPSSI graduate student members. The goal of this newsletter is to build a stronger network among graduate students, while learning about current and future research. Furthermore, the goal is to provide graduate students with rich information to help foster academic and professional development. To reach this goal, this newsletter provides articles on current social issues, advice in succeeding graduate school, and excellent SPSSI scholarship opportunities. I hope you enjoy the newsletter!

Adolfo Cuevas,
Doctoral Student
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A link is provided for Adolfo’s article, “Health Care Reform and What it Means for Us”: http://www.spssi.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=1467

Adolfo Cuevas’s research interest includes social psychological aspects of ethnic/racial health disparities, patient perspectives on cultural competency, minority patient relationships with providers, and social determinants of health for racial/ethnic minorities.
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Current Social Issues

Torture Survivors Seeking Asylum in the United States

Torture is one of the most horrific human rights violations of our time. In addition to physical pain, torturers aim to maximize the terror and mental anguish a victim experiences; resulting in devastating consequence. Torture survivors experience increased rates of disease and chronic pain, persistent mental health difficulties, and most frequently PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Unfortunately, the actual torture experience is often only a part of a long series of traumatic events for the survivor. Many survivors must flee their homeland without warning, often leaving children and other family members behind. For torture survivors who flee to the United States seeking refuge, the complex and lengthy asylum adjudication process can be a source of significant stress and impacts the individuals’ mental health outcomes. In contrast to refugees, asylum-seekers request legal admission from within the United States or at a U.S. port of entry. Under current national policy, during the lengthy adjudication process, asylum seekers are not eligible for refugee benefits until asylum is granted. Although these individuals are legally residing within the United States, they are not permitted access to medical services, or even legal work for some time.

The study of torture is not simply a humanitarian concern, but can also function as a political statement against such horrific human rights violations. My current research program aims to examine the risk and protective factors which impact mental health outcomes for torture survivors seeking treatment and asylum in the United States with the ultimate goal of informing treatment interventions and asylum-related public policy. The current factors I am examining include torture-related factors, somatic and pain related factors, post migration factors, such as separation from children and engagement in school and/or work, as well as factors which influence mental health treatment engagement.

Because this is a relatively new area of research, there are a plethora of research questions which require further study. A particularly important factor to examine is the impact of asylum court date postponements on the mental wellness of survivors. Postponements are a common issue, as well as delay the receipt of benefits, access to healthcare, and family reunion. It is important to examine the impact of access to healthcare on the wellbeing of survivors, because as previously mentioned, asylum-seekers are not eligible for Medicaid or refugee health benefits.

Torture treatment centers in the United States rely heavily on support from the Torture Victim Relief Act (TVRA). Currently, the Torture Victim Relief and Reauthorization Act of 2009 (H.R. 1511) has been received by the Senate, but has not yet fully passed. We can all play a small
role in addressing this social issue via urging our respective representatives to support this bill. Nationally torture treatment centers also rely on volunteer support, particularly from professionals such as interpreters, physicians, dentists, and psychologists. Strengthening this community network will also play a significant role in improving the health and wellbeing of torture survivors seeking refuge in our country.

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Human Services Psychology, Clinical and Community and Applied Social Psychology  
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Elena Welsh research interests include cross-cultural issues, applied research and dissemination, and trauma and resilience.


“Ni de aqui, ni de aya!”:

Immigration, Education and Sense of Belonging among Latino Youth

Immigration laws are negatively affecting Latinos in institutional settings, specifically in educational settings such as schools. California’s Proposition 187, in 1994, would have eliminated health and education benefits for undocumented immigrants, and the Boarder Protection, Anti-terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act, H.R. 4437, in 2006, sought to criminalize and raise penalties for undocumented immigrants in the United States. Prop 187 and H.R. 4437 were meant to exclude immigrants, mostly Latinos, from education, health and other civic practices.

The impact that immigration laws can have on Latino immigrant children and youths access to education should be of concern to American society because the educational curriculums may not be sensitive to the cross-cultural knowledge that immigrant youth may bring with them when in school. The problems surrounding this issue are exacerbated by institutional settings, such as schools, and systemic practices, like education curriculums, that perpetuate the othering and invisibility of immigrants, particularly children, and youth.

The feelings of exclusion, oppression, and the lack of a sense of belonging among Latino children can be notable within institutions. Therefore, my research centers on examining how academic institutions, specifically schools, can facilitate and support opportunities for Latino youth to move from a place of invisibility to a place of visibility via civic engagement, despite the civic identity and citizenship challenges that Latino youth may experience. Thus, my research explores the dynamics of youth civic engagement with in schools settings; youth’s sense belonging and/or exclusion, and the role of schools as mediating structures toward citizenship formation, specifically cultural citizenship (defined as the process of building community through shared cultural practices, as well as reflecting on those practices, and its implications toward a definition of citizenship that incorporates cultural, social, historical and political experiences).

The goals of my research are three-fold. First, how do schools, as institutions, perpetuate the structural barriers that through schooling practices and curriculums perpetuate invisibility and challenge a sense of belonging among Latino youth? Second, how does sense of belonging impact Latino youth’s opportunities to enact civic engagement in their communities, including the school setting? Third, how do schooling practices and structures affect Latino youth’s development of a civic identity (defined as a person’s sense of connection to and participation in the community)? These questions address the broader issues surrounding Latino youth’s citizenship, and what this means within the institutional and political structures that challenge their opportunities to belong and exercise their civil rights.

Implications of my research propose certain strategies to address the institutional and political issues within education that challenge Latino youth’s citizenship and civic identity. Developing educational curriculums and pedagogical practices that are sensitive to the experiences of immigrant Latino youth in the United States are a first step toward reducing the feelings of exclusion and invisibility that immigration laws can have on immigrant Latino youth.

Jesica Siham Fernández, Ph.D.
Social Psychology
Jesica Siham Fernández research interests include immigration, Education, Community, Civic Engagement, Participatory Action Research, Latino Immigrant Youth, Citizenship, Civic Identity and Culture.
What Psychology can do to address the U.S. Prison Rape Epidemic

In the United States, men sent to prison are at risk for sexual assault by other inmates and correctional staff. Prison rapes are often bloody, violent, and physically traumatic – especially gang rapes (Human Rights Watch, 2006). About 1 in 10 men in U.S. prisons are victims (Neal & Clements, 2010; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2000). The psychological sequelae of prison rape are profoundly negative for many victims, often including somatic symptoms, disturbed sleeping and eating patterns, emotional lability, and depression and suicidality (Blaauw, 2005; Cooper & Berwick, 2001; Dumond, 2000; Wolff & Shi, 2009).

My research so far has shed light on the fact that the complex trauma symptoms with which many victims present are not well understood (Neal & Clements, 2010). Although strong empirical research is lacking regarding the symptom pattern many inmate victims evidence, the information that is available about these cases suggests no existing diagnostic category adequately maps onto the symptom presentation. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the closest-fitting diagnostic category, and many victims are diagnosed with PTSD (Dumond, 2000). However, the diagnostic criteria for PTSD are an imperfect fit for rape survivors in general (Atkeson, Calhoun, Resick, & Ellis, 1982), and this appears to be particularly true for male survivors of prison rape. Prison rape survivors may content with repeated victimization, stigma, and humiliation, a pattern not often found for other kinds of sexual assault victims.

Diagnostic problems aside, there are no empirically-based treatments available designed for these victims. The treatment male prison rape victims receive is typically an unstandardized amalgam of existing treatments for other kinds of trauma or other types of victims (e.g., rape victims who are women living in the community; Koss, 1993). It is unclear whether these treatments applied post-hoc to prison rape survivors is effective.

Future research has the potential to contribute greatly to this area and to significantly improve the lives of prison rape survivors. Further examination of the post-rape symptom complex of survivors is needed, to determine whether PTSD is an appropriate diagnosis for victims, or whether the diagnostic categories of the future should be amended to capture the experiences of this population. In addition, developing effective trauma response treatments for these victims is sorely needed.

Although psychology has offered little to date in researching this issue, we have much to offer in terms of describing and treating the traumatic impact of victimization. This area is ripe for research. Our efforts may be aided by the federal government’s recent attention to the issue, as evidenced by the U.S. Congress passing of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) in 2003. Part of the government’s effort to combat prison rape includes a recommendation for funding via the National Institute of Justice for research on sexual assault in correctional facilities. Studying this issue may not only improve the knowledge base of prison rape victimization, but may also add to our understanding of sexual assault in general.

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Tess M.S. Neal is a Ph.D. student studying Clinical Psychology-Law. Her research primarily focuses on ethical behavior of clinicians in forensic evaluations, expert witness credibility, and mentoring relationships.

Selected reference
Sustainability in Native American Communities

To help with the development of Native American communities, changing the face of science and culture in our contemporary times is necessary. As it turns out, the Western scientific model that has allowed us to learn, dominate, and develop just about every landscape and bioregion around the globe is not sustainable. Standard practice of continual economic growth and urbanization is beginning to stumble as the current rate of consumption far exceeds local food, water, and energy resources combined with a lack of new frontier with which to extract future supplies for our growing population.

The new ‘sustainability’ agenda that we have all heard about so much is a collective attempt (the more the better) for reducing consumption rates and waste production to a point of at least equilibrium with the earth’s natural regenerative processes. The problem is that our current mentality has evolved with certain cultural values in place, so it is very hard to undo the expectations, behaviors, and routines of everyone’s day to day life, especially when those behaviors are reinforced with profits for big business or comforts for individuals. In an attempt to learn about ‘new’ ways of valuing the world and thinking about sustainability, the federal government has sought input from the once neglected indigenous populations because their cultural frameworks evolved when interdependence within ecosystems was recognized.

To advance this goal, I work with my advisor on two NSF sponsored projects. The first involves hosting collaborative workshops between Native communities and scientific communities for the purpose of creating a vision of sustainability that includes Native and scientific perspectives. This not only benefits the institution of science but also elevates cultures that have for some time been devalued. The second research project directly attempts to measure the differences in cultural values, orientation towards science and technology, and sustainability goals between Natives and non-native scientists. The goal here is to quantify how these groups differ and what those differences imply for sustainable actions. This might lead to concessions by scientific institutions that colonialist cultural values have discretely influenced the application of scientific knowledge as well as suggest value-based reasons Natives and other minority groups are consistently underrepresented in science disciplines.

The third project is the most recent and is still in its infant stages. The realization that the sustainability agenda is a worldwide concern with a special niche for indigenous populations means that there is room for ambitious Natives to change the world. This third project, also funded by the NSF, is intended to create or improve a program to increase Native participation in the science, technology, engineering, and math fields. Again, this is not only good for science, but a powerful opportunity for Native individuals to received funding for education, to acquire the skills necessary for reservation community development, and become acquainted with fields that offer competitive incomes. This last benefit is especially useful, as poverty is one of the most prevalent issues facing Native Americans, who report higher unemployment and lower incomes beyond all other American minorities\(^1\). Increased participation in competitive fields is an important step to the desired empowerment, self-reliance, and autonomy of Native American communities through Native individuals.
Adam Murry  
Industrial-Organizational Psychology  
Portland State University  

Adam Murry’s research interests include economic development of Native American communities and Native American community sustainability.

The Impact of Stigma on Romantic Relationships among Sexual Minorities

Debate over gay marriage has polarized and ignited the United States for some years now, and a recent decision by President Barack Obama ruling the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unconstitutional reflects an increasing awareness of the damage of such discriminatory policies on the lives of sexual minority men and women. In his letter to Congress on this decision, Attorney General Holder wrote, “The legislative record underlying DOMA’s passage contains... numerous expressions reflecting moral disapproval of gays and lesbians and their intimate and family relationships… [and] stereotype-based thinking and animus” (Department of Justice, 2011). Structural obstacles, such as DOMA, can unquestionably negatively impact the romantic relationships of sexual minority individuals, blocking them from legal recognition and access to public benefits. However, the damage sustained by sexual minority relationships due to broader social stigma, reflected in the attitudes of the legislators referred to by Holder, remains largely unclear.

When considering how stigma impacts sexual minority relationships, investigators can examine prejudice directed both at the level of the couple (e.g. work by Justin Lehmiller and his colleagues) and at the level of the individual. My own work focuses on the latter issue. How exactly does sexual minority stigma at the individual level affect romantic relationship functioning? A meta-analytic review that I am currently conducting on this topic reveals the dearth of information now available to social scientists as well as the general public. While researchers have theorized that those who perceive themselves to be targets of prejudice and discrimination due to their sexual orientation might be less likely to initiate and sustain satisfying romantic relationships, empirical data documenting this association is necessary in order to advance knowledge and, ultimately, public action.

In some of my research, I am experimentally examining the impact of stigma on romantic relationships among sexual minorities as well as other stigmatized social groups in the United States. Preliminary results suggest that experiencing stigma leads to decrements in self-reported relationship functioning, especially for those who are highly conscious of their stigmatized status. This line of research has myriad public implications. To begin with, data from these studies bolster the fact that marriage equality is a necessary step in the United States and in many other countries. Furthermore, work examining the mechanism whereby stigma impairs romantic relationship functioning can be used to establish programs and interventions for sexual minority individuals and couples struggling with these issues. Additionally, evidence for the strong association between social relationships and physical health (e.g., Umberson & Montez, 2010) indicates that these data have implications for public health, potentially explaining social disparities in a variety of physical health outcomes.

Despite being the targets of prejudice and discrimination, sexual minority men and women do manage to maintain loving, long-lasting relationships with their romantic partners (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Yet unjust obstacles that reflect intolerance and bigotry can and should be removed from their paths. As social scientists, in keeping with our ethical obligations, we are well-suited to do this work in a rigorous and systematic way.

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David Matthews research broadly focuses on the consequences of stigma for physical health, psychological health and social relationships, as well as how individuals cope with stigmatized identities.
Illuminating the Quagmire of Success in Graduate School

Success in graduate school is a debatable topic. Most academics across the varied disciplines would argue that success is measured in finishing your course work, your practicum hours, your comprehensive exams, and your graduate thesis (or any combination, thereof). While this may be the general consensus, often this is only half true. Indeed there is a not-so-glamorous side to graduate school that often casually overlooked as our good natured mentors support our aspirations. While I had a largely positive experience during my graduate years earning a Master’s in General Experimental Psychology, there were times that I wished someone had told me, “Watch out! Your confidence is about to break!”

As a Latino, first-generation college student, I had no idea what graduate school was all about, let alone that I was capable of going through a graduate program. A PhD was too scary at the time, but a Master’s seemed like a great stepping stone. Little did I know how different the grad school experience was going to be. One of a cohort of seven, student led seminars, papers seemingly due every week, statistics tests that made students cry—it was exhausting on all fronts! Thankfully, I had an amazing cohort that would cheer each other on whenever we stumbled. Mentoring aside, this proved to be the single most important benefit in my graduate studies. To have emerging scholars like myself with me in the trenches, to whine, console, and congratulate made it not just tolerable, but even fun. Now, I know that some programs do not foster a collaborative atmosphere. To that effect, I challenge you to make an effort to create that environment, even if it’s with one other person.

It takes a lot of focus, self-motivation, curiosity, and surrender to succeed in graduate school. It’s almost a paradox, but the sooner I surrendered to the pressures of grad life, the sooner I was able to parse it out in manageable phases. This lasted until I had to develop my thesis project. This was the most taxing time; I felt imposter syndrome rearing its ugly head (that is, feeling as though you don’t belong) as I felt the stress to get my project off the ground. Through my concerted efforts, I pulled through, but only secondary to the mentorship I received. It should be noted that you shouldn’t feel limited to being mentored by your committee, but by anyone in the department that shares your values. It’s important you find mentors that are not only expert in your line of research but also are empathetic to you as a person first and as mentee second.

Not everyone makes it through grad school; it’s not necessarily due to ability. It’s often poor fit that trumps their efforts, either with the program or with mentors. Even if you don’t know what you want to do, it is respectable that you take the time to figure it out. So take heed, fellow scholars. Your future happiness will depend on it.

Jonathan Xavier Zeledon, M.A.
General-Experimental Psychology
California State University Northridge
Jonathan Xavier Zeledon earned his Master’s in General-Experimental Psychology at California State University Northridge (CSUN) in Northridge, California in 2008. His research interests include ethnic identity development among Latino adolescents, prejudice reduction, and academic resilience. He currently teaches part-time in the psychology department at CSUN with courses in introductory, lifespan, and cultural psychology as well as research methods.
**Helpful tips to remember during your graduate career**

A graduate degree can be an incredibly rewarding experience. Outside of obtaining the parchment that credits you as a ‘Master’ or ‘Doctor’ of your field, the journey toward the degree brings memories that will be with you forever. Like any adventure, there will be ‘ups’ and ‘downs’ and moments you will ask yourself, ‘Why am I doing this?’ Alongside the difficult moments are satisfying experiences that affirm your choice to pursue academia. Below I have listed suggestions to help make the progression of your degree as successful and enjoyable as possible.

I will start with an exercise:

*Imagine sitting in a room of people who are making brilliant points about topics you have no idea about. Just when you start to grasp what you think the meaning of the word ‘antidisestablishmentarianism’ is, you are asked to provide your own brilliant insights. Of course, you respond with ‘Uhh... ’ before the room erupts in laughter.*

OK, don’t worry. This will not happen.

Fear is common for first time graduate students and is rarely based in reality. It is natural to feel nervous in a new environment. This leads me to my first point:

1) **Do know you belong.** There was no mistake made upon admission and your name did not slip through the ‘cracks’. Everyone feels intimidated upon entry into graduate studies, but this is normal. All graduate students have aptitudes to offer the academy.

2) **Do your best.** As months pass, you may find that the workload seems unmanageable and that you are feeling overwhelmed. No matter what your program is, or how many deadlines you must meet, do your best. Talk to your peers, talk to your supervisor, and persevere. There are limits on what you can do, and you will have to prioritize, but do the best you can with the resources you have available to you.

3) **Do take care of yourself.** Maintaining balance in your life between school obligations and personal care is crucial. Not only will you feel better, but good physical and mental health choices will improve your work. Take breaks, give yourself recognition, let yourself have fun, keep active, and eat well.

4) **Do not judge yourself in comparison to others.** Everyone has a different program trajectory and yours is unique to you. Have confidence that you are doing well so long as you are meeting your deadlines, keeping in touch with your supervisor, and doing your best.

5) **Do not take criticism personally.** Fundamentally the academy is a competitive environment. Expect rejection before praise and use it for growth. Everyone experiences it and it is meant to improve quality of work, not to insult you.
As a graduate student planning to defend my thesis next month, I have learned vast amounts through conversations with peers and faculty. My personal advice is that informal knowledge can be just as useful as formal knowledge. Good luck in your studies!

Courtney Petruik, M.A.
Department of Sociology,
University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.
Courtney Petruik research interest broadly focuses on aging and addiction.
The Clara Mayo Grants

In Support of Masters’ Theses and Pre-Dissertation Research on Sexism, Racism, or Prejudice

The Clara Mayo Grant program was set up to support masters’ theses or pre-dissertation research on aspects of sexism, racism, or prejudice, with preference given to students enrolled in a terminal master’s program. Studies of the application of theory or the design of interventions or treatments to address these problems are welcome.

ELIGIBILITY

Individuals who are SPSSI members and who have matriculated in graduate programs in psychology, applied social science, and related disciplines. A student who is applying for a Grants-In-Aids may not apply for the Clara Mayo award in the same award year. Applicants may submit only one Mayo application per calendar year.

AWARDS AND CRITERIA

Up to six grants will be awarded annually. The maximum amount of any grant is $1,000. Proposals that include a college or university agreement to match the amount requested will be favored, but proposals without matching funds will also be considered.

DEADLINE

The annual deadline for the Spring round is May 2nd. 1st.

For more information on this particular award please click the link below:

The Social Issues Dissertation Award

ELIGIBILITY

Any doctoral dissertation in psychology (or in a social science with psychological subject matter) accepted between March 1st 2009 and March 1, 2010 is eligible. Please note that in the AWARD year (July 1 – June 30) an individual or group may only submit one paper to one SPSSI award (from amongst the Allport, Klineberg, and Dissertation Awards).

AWARDS

A first prize of $1000 and a second prize of $500 will be awarded to the dissertations that best demonstrate scientific excellence and potential application to social problems.

DEADLINE

The deadline for this year is May 10, 2011.

For more information on this particular award please click the link below:

The Grants-In-Aid Program

The SPSSI Committee on Grants-in-Aid (GIA) wishes to support scientific research in social problem areas related to the basic interests and goals of SPSSI and particularly those that are not likely to receive support from traditional sources. The Committee especially encourages proposals involving (a) unique and timely research opportunities, (b) underrepresented institutions, graduate students, and junior scholars, (c) volunteer research teams, and (d) actual, not pilot, projects. Funds are not normally provided for travel to conventions, travel or living expenses while conducting research, stipends of principal investigators, costs associated with manuscript preparation, or the indirect costs of institutions.

ELIGIBILITY

The applicant must be a member of SPSSI. Applicants may submit only one application per deadline. If an applicant has applied to the Clara Mayo Grant in the same award year (July 1 – June 30), she or he is not eligible to apply for GIA. Individuals may submit a joint application.

AWARDS

Funding up to $1000 is available for graduate student research if proposals are accompanied by evidence of a request for appropriate university official agreement to match the amount requested. Strong preference is given to applications from students at the dissertation stage of the graduate career. Such proposals must be accompanied by an appropriate official university agreement to match the amount requested. This matching requirement will not be waived for institutions that have adopted a policy of not providing matching funds to support graduate student research. Funding up to $2000 is available for research by SPSSI members who already have a Ph.D. Documentation of submission to the applicant’s Institution IRB must accompany every submission. In exceptional circumstances the amount may exceed $2000. The usual grant from SPSSI is for up to $2000 for post-doctoral work and up to $1000 for pre-doctoral work.

DEADLINE

The annual deadline for the Spring round is May 15th.

For more information on this particular award please click the link below: