



2025 SENIOR THESIS PRESENTATION DAY



Department of Sociology

Morning Session

9 – 10 a.m.

Health & Community 1, Palmer 123

Moderator: Chantal Figueroa

Maya Elias
Emma Langas
Tori Hodkin

Government, Laws, Rights, Palmer 124

Moderator: Gail Murphy-Geiss

Anna Clearman
Heather Hatch
Tim Smith

Morning Session

10:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Health & Community 2, Palmer 123

Moderator: Vanessa Muñoz

Tess Rittenberg
Maren Snow
Maddy Meister

College Experience, Palmer 124

Moderator: Sandi Wong

Wiley Holbrooke
Corrina Gardner
Anyia Jones

Lunch for Presenters and Faculty, Palmer 131

11:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.

Afternoon Session

1:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Immigration, Palmer 123

Moderator: Eric Popkin

Mariss Gonzales
Jordan McMurtry
Alex Reynolds-Scheel

Identities of Inequality, Palmer 124

Moderator: Cayce Hughes

Gaby Alamillo Sanches
Aiko Reidy
Gemma Giovale

Afternoon Session

2:30 – 3:50 p.m.

Spacial and Environmental Inequalities, Palmer 123

Moderator: Paulina Inara-Rodis

India Adam
Martina Hasler-Arantes
Maya Toribio
Alex Walker

Health and Community, Panel 1

Palmer 123

9 – 10 a.m.

Maya Elias

Lost in Care: The Disjunction Between Political Discourse and Ideals of Language Accessibility in Healthcare

Language barriers in healthcare have proven to be a significant challenge in achieving equitable healthcare access and outcomes. Language access policy has articulated a mission to bridge language barriers throughout social services and promoted messages which fall in alignment with progressive ideologies of access. However, through performing a Critical Discourse Analysis of Executive Order 13166: Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency, a broader discourse of dominance and control over non-English speaking persons in social institutions is communicated. This discrepancy unveils how paternalistic models of care in healthcare are naturalized by political discourse, and accordingly, inhibit non-English language persons from being autonomous agents of their health. This study deconstructs how discourses of bureaucratic authority, restriction, and a provider work in collaboration to uphold hierarchical systems of power.

Emma Langas

A Quantitative Analysis of Redlining, Segregation, and COVID-19 Health Outcomes in Chicago

Redlining and racial segregation have been associated with numerous differential health outcomes. As demographic data of COVID-19 health outcomes became available, studies quickly discovered that Black and Latinx individuals bore a disproportionate percentage of COVID-19 cases and deaths and had differential access to testing and vaccination services. Previous research found evidence of an association between redlining and segregation and COVID-19 health outcomes, but few focused on the city of Chicago, one of the most highly segregated cities in the United States. This study used data from the American Community Survey (ACS), historic Homeowner's Loan Corporation (HOLC) maps, and the City of Chicago data portal from March 20th, 2020 to December 31st, 2020 to assess the association between redlining grades and COVID-19 infection, mortality, vaccination rates, and the difference in outcomes over varying levels of racial and ethnic segregation.

Tori Hodkin

Identifying the Comm in Communicable: A Critical Discourse Analysis into Local and State Department of Health Communications Regarding the Measles Outbreaks in 2024

Measles is a highly contagious, respiratory virus that manifests as a disease often accompanied by severe complications. As described by the Center for Disease Control, measles is a vaccine preventable disease. Cases steadily fell after the vaccine was first introduced in 1963 and decreased exponentially with the introduction of a second dose in 1990. The disease was conceptualized as eliminated in 2000. Despite this declaration, measles cases have made a resurgence in recent years. This case study seeks to uncover how local public health departments conceptualize responses to measles outbreaks, and how this language affirms and is affirmed by the department identified collective values of the community. Using critical discourse analysis, this case study will address how Illinois and Florida employ different strategies in communication. This research provides insight into how language naturalizes and validates collective (in)action in the face of communicable disease.

Government, Laws, and Rights

Palmer 124

9 – 10 a.m.

Anna Clearman

Judicial Decision Making in Supreme Court Opinions

This project attempts to bridge the gap between the fields of sociology and legal studies to address the critical issues surrounding judicial decision making that have become important to the functioning of American democracy in recent years. For this project I set out to answer the following questions: How do originalist Supreme Court justices conceive their power? How do they express this power to the American public? How does the judicial philosophy of originalism appear in Supreme Court decisions? What is the impact of originalism on the Court's decisions? To answer these questions, I did a document analysis of originalist Supreme Court opinions. Through this research, I found that originalist justices rely on appeals to moral reasoning, warnings of pragmatic consequences of alternative legal interpretations, and discrediting of non-originalist judges. These findings provide important background into the decision-making processes of Supreme Court Justices and illustrates the importance of interdisciplinary research in sociology.

Heather Hatch

Attitudes Towards Free Speech: A Cross-Cultural Study Between France and the United States

While the First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees an almost absolute protection of free speech, France imposes stricter regulations, balancing individual expression with social responsibility. Based on survey data, the cultural framework in which individuals are raised may play a significant role in how they define and value freedom of speech. In the United States, with a large emphasis on individual rights, citizens are more likely to prioritize personal expression. In contrast, restrictive laws in France create a more collectivist mindset among citizens, where exercising free speech is often considered within the broader context of social responsibility. However, the data find that current political climates may also have an impact on individual attitudes when it comes to regulating free speech. Recent elections in the United States may have affected how American participants responded to survey questions. Overall, by comparing these two countries, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how two similar democracies may see freedom of speech quite differently.

Tim Smith

Liberal Discourse in Decline and the Rise in Trump-Style Facism

This thesis retroactively interrogates the rhetorical and ideological mechanisms underpinning the 2024 U.S. presidential campaigns cycle in the context of "Trump-style fascism" and the ascendant media strategy known as "Flood the Zone" (FTZ) politics. Drawing upon abolitionist, decolonial, and marxist-historical frameworks, I argue the importance of rethinking fascism in the American context. In doing so, I contest the shock induced by FTZ by examining the historical and theoretical roots of Trump-style fascism. I argue that Trump's authoritarian governance is not an aberration, but a historically charged reassertion of America as a raced, classed, and gendered project of western capitalism. Through comparative critical discourse analysis of the candidates' nomination acceptance speeches, I explore how both parties use similar strategies to construct divergent visions of America and appeal to crisis rhetorics, moral values, and national identity. This work challenges assumptions of American exceptionalism and urges a rethinking of discourse, meaning-making, and mainstream resistance in a post-FTZ, post-consensus era.

Health and Community, Panel 2

Palmer 123

10:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Tess Rittenberg

Community-Based Service for All: A Qualitative Analysis of Cherry Creek School District's Office of Student Health and Recommendations for Their Upcoming Student and Family Resource Center

This thesis analyzes the efficacy of district programming to provide social services to a wide variety of demographics in Cherry Creek School District (CCSD) through a qualitative analysis conducted within their Office of Student Health. Through interviews with 12 district staff and one high school nurse, this study aims to address the gap of trust between education and healthcare systems and determine how to foster cultural trust and a community health approach in Cherry Creek School District. Staff provide their perspectives on the efficacy of programs and recommendations for the upcoming student and family resource center on Overland high school's campus in Aurora, Colorado. The author analyzes this data and provides their own recommendations, including increasing information sharing, developing support for families and educators as well as students, and eliminating basic access barriers such as transportation and timing that may be a result of negative effects relating to social determinants of health.

Maren Snow

Paths to Recovery: How Drug Treatment Courts Facilitate and Limit Identity Transformation

Drug treatment courts (DTCs) have been associated with lower rates of recidivism and higher rates of sobriety compared to traditional courts. While some research suggests these outcomes may be connected to shifts in participants' identities, there is limited qualitative research exploring how these transformations happen. This study addresses that gap through in-depth interviews with a graduate and two late-phase participants in a local DTC (Recovery Court), examining whether and how the program facilitates identity change. The analysis focuses on potential mechanisms such as program structure, therapy, sanctions, and access to prosocial opportunities, while acknowledging challenges like financial barriers, racial dynamics, and continued ties to past communities. Ultimately, this study offers insight into how Recovery Court may support identity transformation and long-term recovery, while recognizing the complexity of participants' experiences.

Maddy Meister

Disability, Mental Illness, and Debilitation: A Critical, Theoretical Exploration

In this thesis, I engage in crucial conversations about the ways societies construct and enforce norms of ability and mental health to uphold violent systems of oppression. In critiquing how colonialism and capitalism produce and sustain these constructions, I shed light on various intersections of systemic power, social control, and marginalized experiences. I examine how institutional systems like prisons, schools, and psychiatric facilities target and pathologize marginalized groups, legitimizing surveillance and carceral control, and often disguise this as care or progress. I explore how these systems discredit non-normative ways of being, framing them as deviant or unproductive, to maintain societal hierarchies. By connecting individual experiences to broader systemic mechanisms, I demonstrate how ableism and racism operate as forces of domination. I aim to move beyond critique to offer pathways for transformation through decolonial perspectives.

College Experience

Palmer 124

10:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Wiley Holbrooke

The Power of the Uniform: Navigation of Police Labor Under the Contradictory Nature of a Sometimes-Policing Agency

The Department of Campus Safety at Colorado College is an agency that takes on a wide array of safety-related missions. Within their broad capacity, the officers are regularly performing duties that are both supportive and enforcing. In eleven in-depth interviews, officers describe the duality of their jobs and how they respond to crises and contradictions. This study finds that officers have to navigate the literal and metaphorical power that their uniforms provide. Many of them find meaning and value in their work but they also feel somewhat devalued within the policing labor that they execute. Their navigation of these dueling powers involves exercising discretion in four categories: property protection, rationalization of negative behavior, deflection of enforcement to authorities, and reliance on protocols. I use an abolitionist epistemology to interrogate suggestions of meritocratic enforcement within an institution that is otherwise supportive. I then discuss the implications of including police labor in otherwise supportive services and the disparate outcomes that can arise from such police labor.

Corrina Gardner

'My Education Wouldn't Be Complete Without It:' Student Perceptions on the Impact of American Study Abroad Programs

Study abroad is a rapidly growing institutional activity in higher education. At a small, private, liberal arts, PWI like Colorado College, the majority of students take advantage of opportunities to go abroad, either with CC or with a partner institution. As supported by existing literature, study abroad is understood as a part of the concept, process, and event of globalization (Bayart 2007). It also, more recently, has been critiqued for being guided by neoimperial attitudes. Through 12 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with current students who have studied abroad, I investigate how these students perceive and make sense of the impact of study abroad on themselves, their host location/community, and the world at large. This study hopes to prompt study abroad programs and students to be more intentional in their experiences.

Anya Jones

Growing Up and Hooking Up: The Impact of Social Class, Parenting Practices, and Sexuality on Hook-Up Culture

Hookup culture has been studied since its emergence with research reporting it has largely overtaken dating on college campuses. This study examines the intersection between hookup culture and social class, specifically using Lareau's theories of child rearing called concerted cultivation and natural growth. This paper asks how social class, parenting practices and messages, and sexuality affect how women participate in and feel about hookup culture. A survey was sent to every female-identifying senior on one college campus, and analysis was conducted to reveal relationships across variables. This study concluded that social class, parenting messages, and sexuality each has a significant relationship to how women interact with hookup culture. Future research should investigate additional factors that influence sexual behaviors, specifically intersecting identities across race, ethnicity, social class, and sexual identity and the longitudinal effects of social phenomena such as feminist movements and social media.

Immigration

Palmer 123

1:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Marissa Gonzales

Between Family and Aspiration: Emotional Burdens and the Pursuit of Upward Mobility for First Generation Mexican Adults from the Mexico-U.S. Border

In the context of borderland cities, there is limited knowledge of how young people experience their socio-economic disadvantage and cultural lives while striving for upward mobility. In this paper, I draw on eight in-depth interviews with first-generation, low-income young Mexican adults from Brownsville, Texas to explore the dimensions of life that shape emotional health as connected to their personal development. The findings highlight intersecting layers of influence that shape these young adults' aspirations, motivations, and pressures. Additionally, participants develop emotional coping strategies fostering both independence and emotional distance while relying on familial expectations to push forward. I argue that place, culture, and family play the most significant roles, along with enduring ties to the structural forces that drive their pursuit of a better future.

Jordan McMurtry

“Am I Going to Be Here My Whole Life?”: Testimonies and Consequences of Asylum Bans from People in New Mexico Immigration Detention

This study investigates how individuals seeking asylum in the United States detained in New Mexico navigate and experience the consequences of President Biden's bans on asylum. A specific focus investigates experiences associated with the May 2023 Circumvention of Lawful Pathways and the June 2024 Proclamation on Securing the Border. Interviews with 17 individuals from Central America, South America, and West Africa were conducted during the months of September and October in 2024. Narratives find experiences of waiting where the exposure of these individuals to the dangers associated with waiting to enter the United States and in detention have been prolonged. Findings demonstrate that these delays are associated with the bans themselves and have succeeded in denying individuals access to the asylum process altogether, a violation of both international and domestic law. The effect of these policies includes a form of deterrence which notably operates through legal violence in the case of these bans on asylum.

Alex Reynolds-Scheel

Who Should be Protected from Whom? How a National Security Framework Shaped Asylum Law

This thesis examines how the nexus of U.S. national security policy and asylum law reframed asylum seekers as threats rather than individuals in need of protection. I explore how asylum seeker's initial interactions with the immigration system reflect underlying national security concerns, and the extent to which a security-first approach allows for the distinction to be made between varying migrant claims for asylum. Drawing on personal observations and interviews with detained asylum seekers, an immigration lawyer, and a Border Patrol agent, this study highlights the lived consequences of restrictive policies, including detention, systemic bias, and racialized exclusion. By challenging the national security logic governing asylum, this research calls for a reimagining of asylum as a fundamental human right.

Identities of Inequality

Palmer 124

1:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Gaby Alamillo Sanchez

To Feel Alive: Femmes of Color, the Erotic, and Self-Expression as Spiritual Practices of Resistance Through Art

In this project, I, as a woman of color, explore how everyday forms of expression are both tangible and accessible, while significantly contributing to larger social movements. Drawing from Audre Lorde's *The Erotic* (1978) and femme theory, I frame my argument through these theoretical lenses. Using myself as a participant, I aim to provide an example of my overall argument and conduct content analysis on four femme-identifying artists of color (FoC) from diverse backgrounds, who serve as informal mentors (Santamaria and Jaramillo 2014) in my practice of collage-making. This creative process serves as a means of expression, healing, and empowerment, while also allowing me to collect qualitative data on my experiences as a femme-identifying person of color in academia. In this article, I use non-traditional research methods that I form by merging existing theories on femme-ininity, empowerment, and femme solidarity with non-academic practices. Though art and expression are often dismissed as unimportant or unproductive in creating social change, I argue that they are vital, daily acts of accessible resistance which are more than capable of supporting community healing and contributing to liberation efforts.

Aiko Reidy

Passing to Proving: Digital Mixed-Race Subjecthood on TikTok

Social media platforms like TikTok are often championed as fruitful spaces for expanding connectivity through increased awareness of different cultures and politics. Social media also provides a valuable space to challenge and reimagine the bounds of Asian America and expand the meaning of Americanness. Recent trends on TikTok grapple with Asian American creators' expressions of mixed-race Asian American identity, calling for the investigation of how social reality and mixed-race identity are constructed through digital cultures. Using qualitative content analysis methods on TikTok videos about mixed-race white and Asian creators ("Wasians"), this paper analyzes performances of mixed-race identity, revealing how Wasians pathologize their racial identity. This paper argues that while historically, biracial Americans have sought to 'pass' for white, manifestations of Wasian identity on TikTok demonstrate a desire to 'prove' ethnic identity to gain racial and erotic capital.

Gemma Giovale

Class Traitors: Inheritance, Responsibility, and Framing

There is a growing trend of people with inherited wealth choosing to redistribute it in a way that is mindful of the power structures inherent in philanthropy. Several organizations work in this space to organize wealthy people for social justice and encourage wealthy individuals to radically change the way they understand money. I interviewed nine people who participate in redistribution of their inherited wealth for social justice. This paper explored the ways that they make sense of this process, their class, and their position in society. They found ways, often through these groups or organizations to reframe their privilege and access to wealth. This paper builds on the literature concerned with the sociology of the wealthy as a way to understand how power functions in class dynamics. By looking at wealthy people who are questioning the entrenched dynamics of class in the US, I explore how these dynamics can change.

Spatial and Environmental Inequalities

Palmer 123

2:30 – 3:50 p.m.

India Adam

“I’m Under No Illusions that our Water is Pure”: Work Identity and Ontological Security in the Aftermath of Fountain Valley, Colorado PFAS Contamination

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a class of pervasive chemicals that bioaccumulate in both humans and the environment, causing growing global concern. The substances are also used in firefighting foam at military installations. In 2016, the public water of Fountain Valley, CO was found to have been contaminated with PFAS, attributed to the surrounding military presence. This qualitative environmental sociology paper argues the impacts of work identity on the understandings of the PFAS contamination by – and ontological security of – community members. The case study reveals that the strong attachment the community has to its neighborhood makes it challenging to hold accountable any institution that contributes to the community's economic stability. Instead, it displaces blame to larger organizations. Displacing blame, despite significant personal loss due to the contamination, preserves the ontological security of the community.

Martina Hasler-Arantes

Disparities of Global Change: Theories of Environmental Impact on Vulnerability and Mitigation of Climate Change

Drawing from Environmental Sociology perspectives, this thesis assesses the role of Ecological Modernization and Political Economy theories in understanding and addressing climate change. Situated within the context of increasing environmental damage and irreversible changes in the climate, this study investigates how economic and political structures influence environmental performance, vulnerability, and adaptive capacity in a global context. The findings of this study demonstrate that, even though Ecological Modernization and Political Economy theory have opposing perspectives, there is a need to assess them as complementary. This suggests that, while Ecological Modernization provides key factors to addressing vulnerability and mitigation efforts to climate change, it fails to account for power dynamics and global inequalities inherent in the capitalist system. This thesis argues for a more integrated approach, recognizing the complementarity of both theories in addressing the global climate crisis and its unequal impacts.

Alex Walker

Transit-Oriented or Capital-Oriented: Denver and Transit Related Gentrification

This thesis examines the relationship between Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and gentrification related demographic changes in Denver, Colorado from 2010 to 2019. This study examines to see whether neighborhoods with increased access to transit also experienced a rise in educational attainment, which was used to operationalize gentrification. Using data from the American Community Survey and Walk Score's transit score, an OLS regression was used to examine 59 Denver neighborhoods outlined by census tracts. It is found that a significant relationship exists between increased access to transit and higher levels of educational attainment, showing that Denver residents might be at higher risk of displacement with new transit. This study contributes to the growing literature critiquing transit expansion in the name of the capital accumulation and seeks to resolve the transit paradox in which lower income residents are displaced by public investment built for them.

Spatial and Environmental Inequalities

Palmer 123

2:30 – 3:50 p.m.

Maya Toribio

Wealth, Whiteness, and Wilderness: Minoritized Students' Experience with Exclusion in Outdoor Recreation Spaces at Colorado College

Research on outdoor recreation and a historical understanding of the processes that have contextualized the American wilderness has documented barriers to access for people of color, queer people, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals (Cronon 1996, Avery 2015, Ray and Sibara 2017, Humphrey 2020, Sierra Club 2020). These identities have also long been ostracized from higher education institutes (Noltemeyer 2012). My research examines the intersection of this oppression and alienation in outdoor recreation in the context of higher education. I ask how these barriers may coalesce in spaces like Colorado College's campus, where student identity is rooted in "outdoorsiness," and experience in outdoor recreation is important social and cultural capital. I focus on the function of block break as a sort of 'control' period, a time when students have no assigned schoolwork or class to attend. I seek to understand how block break may serve to exacerbate inequality on campus and in outdoor recreation by isolating students who lack the financial, social, or cultural freedom to escape to the wilderness.

Not Presenting

Yuki Yang

Bridging the Gap or Widening It: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Asian American Policy in NYC

Asian American mental health has become an increasingly visible subject amongst various fields of study, yet mainstream discourse often fails to account for the complex intergenerational and class-based dynamics within this field. While mental health policy is contemporarily framed through the lenses of the global mental health movement and culturally competent care, the language within these frameworks can reproduce unequal power relations between state institutions, service providers, and marginalized populations. This study examines what discourses are embedded within the Asian American Foundation's (AAF) Bridging the Gap: Policy Recommendations for Improving Asian American Mental Health Services. Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the policy recommendation document was analyzed to uncover how labor, race, and mental health are constructed. The analysis identified three dominant discourses: material shortage, othering, and human competency. These discourses expose the limitations of neoliberal mental health frameworks and reveal the complicated role of community-based organizations and nonprofits in delivering effective care that addresses the structural realities of Asian American communities in New York City.

Natalie Logue

Graduated December 2024

Congratulations to the class of 2025!
We wish you every success in your future endeavors.

A reception for the presenting seniors and the faculty will follow at the Tutt Alumni House. Beverages and hors d'oeuvres will be served.
Please bring your ID for wine and beer.

