

SOCIOL 1145: CHILDREN’S RIGHTS AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Fall 2023

Tuesdays, 9:45-11:45, William James 501

Instructor: Isabel Jijon

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Office hours: Thursday 10:00 am to noon at WJH 427 and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In March 2018, over one million children and adolescents marched to Washington DC in one of the largest protests in U.S. history. The children were demanding better gun control legislation, citing their “right to life.” In August 2018, a 15-year-old girl held a weekly protest outside of the Swedish parliament. She wanted politicians to take stronger action against climate change, ensuring her generation’s “right to survival.” And in November 2017, children protested in Buenos Aires, Argentina, outside an International Labor Organization conference. Surprisingly, the children wanted leaders to legalize child labor, to grant them the “right to work.”

All these children, in different ways, were exercising, demanding, and transforming children’s rights – the set of legal and moral entitlements the world has promised to children. These children also show the potential, opportunities, and contradictions of the children’s rights framework. In this class, we will explore the history, implementation, and backlash to this framework. We will ask questions like: What are children’s rights? Why do they matter? How have they impacted the lives of children worldwide? And what happens when children start “talking back”? What is the future of children’s rights and youth participation?

In this class, we will answer these questions in two ways:

1. We will discuss both legal and sociological studies of children’s rights. While legal scholars write about what children’s rights should be, sociologists explore what children’s rights actually are, how people interpret, apply, and respond to these ideas in practice.
2. Each student will also go out into the real world and conduct a short study on children’s rights, learning sociology by doing sociology. Possible questions include: How do public spaces include or exclude different groups of children? How much do people know about or care about children’s rights? How do media organizations respond to child or youth activism? What types of stories, images, or assumptions do social movements use when promoting the rights of children?

By the end of the course, students will be well-versed on the issues surrounding children’s rights, will learn how to study children’s rights in action, and will be able to apply your newfound skills and knowledge to any future jobs, advocacy, or creative work you choose to pursue.

ABOUT THE PROFESSOR

Isabel Jijon is a Harvard College Fellow in the Sociology Department. She earned her PhD from Yale University, where she studied culture, globalization, collective memory, children’s rights, and global

campaigns against child labor. Most of her work focuses on Latin America and the global South. For more information see: <https://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/people/isabel-jijon>.

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

COVID-19 safety: Harvard is currently a mask-optional campus, as Middlesex County is at “medium” risk. Please, **do not come to class if you are feeling sick**. I encourage you to err on the side of caution. You will not be penalized for missing class – there will be opportunities to make up the work. If I get sick and have to miss class, we will transition to an asynchronous model.

Attendance policy: If you’re not sick, attendance in class is mandatory and constitutes 5% of your grade. If you are unable to come to class, please email me **in advance** so we will find a way for you to make up the material.

Technology: Please do not use cellphones during class. Cellphone use distracts not only yourselves, but also the students sitting around you.

Late assignments: Assignments should be submitted on Canvas on their due dates. In case of extenuating circumstances, please email me in advance. Otherwise, I will deduct a third of a letter grade per day that your homework is late (i.e. A becomes A-, A- becomes B+, etc.).

Communication: You are welcome to come to our office hours with any matter concerning the course. The best way to reach me at other times is by email (jijon@fas.harvard.edu). I respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays and within 48 hours over weekends.

ASSIGNMENTS

Readings and discussion questions: All readings will be available on the Canvas website. For each class, you are expected to read two to three academic articles or book chapters. Please write discussion questions based on the week’s readings. These should be uploaded to Canvas the night before the seminar.

Research project: By the end of the class, you will have completed a research project on a topic of your choice. The project will include three deliverables:

- *Research proposal:* A 5- to 8-page proposal detailing the project you will undertake. We will discuss possible questions, cases, and research methods during class.
- *Research memo:* A 5- to 8-page research memo detailing your preliminary findings, as well as comments and reflections of what you see in the data.
- *Research paper:* A 15- to 20-page research paper due during finals week. This is your chance to apply and think with the concepts discussed in class.

Late assignments: Assignments should be submitted on Canvas on their due dates. In case of extenuating circumstances that prevent you from handing in your work on time, please email me in advance. Otherwise,

I will deduct a third of a letter grade per day that your homework is late (i.e. A becomes A-, A- becomes B+, etc.).

GRADING

Assignment	Due	Percentage
Attendance and participation	Ongoing	13%
Discussion questions	Ongoing	12%
Research proposal	October 17	20%
Research memo	December 5	20%
Final paper	December 15	35%

The final grades will follow the College's grading system:

A	(100 % to 94.0%)	Earned by work whose excellent quality indicates a full mastery of the subject and, in the case of the grade of A, is of extraordinary distinction.
A-	(< 94.0 % to 90.0%)	
B+	(< 90.0 % to 87.0%)	Earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities.
B	(< 87.0 % to 84.0%)	
B-	(< 84.0 % to 80.0%)	
C+	(< 80.0 % to 77.0%)	Earned by work that indicates an adequate and satisfactory comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and participating in class activities.
C	(< 77.0 % to 74.0%)	
C-	(< 74.0 % to 70.0%)	
D+	(< 70.0 % to 67.0%)	Earned by work that is unsatisfactory but that indicates some minimal command of the course materials and some minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
D	(< 67.0 % to 64.0%)	
D-	(< 64.0 % to 61.0%)	
E	(< 61.0 % to 0.0%)	Earned by work which is unsatisfactory and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For research paper assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in sociology and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that helped you with your work (usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/). If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), this assistance should also be acknowledged.

You may use **AI programs (e.g. ChatGPT)** to help with ideas and brainstorm. However, keep in mind that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Also, too much reliance on AI may stifle your own independent thinking and creativity (the whole point of college!). You cannot submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include AI material, it must be cited like any other reference. For further information, please see the Harvard's Academic Resource Center (<https://academicresourcecenter.harvard.edu/>).

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Harvard University values inclusive excellence and providing equal educational opportunities for all students. Our goal is to remove barriers for disabled students related to inaccessible elements of instruction or design in this course. If reasonable accommodations are necessary to provide access, please contact the [Disability Access Office \(DAO\)](#). Accommodations do not alter fundamental requirements of the course and are not retroactive. You should request accommodations as early as possible, since they may take time to implement. Please notify DAO at any time during the semester if adjustments to their communicated accommodation plan are needed.

WRITING AND RESEARCH HELP

The Departmental Writing Fellow assists anyone taking a sociology course with individual consultations and with workshops. You can find out more about the DWF's work and schedule an appointment here: <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/sociologydwf/departmental-writing-fellow>. In addition, there is a video of a writing workshop in sociology online, which may be useful to course students: <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/sociologydwf/writing-workshop>. Also, take advantage of the Harvard Writing Center and its many helpful resources: <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu>.

The Sociology department also offers advising in quantitative and qualitative methods, which would be particularly useful as you start working on your term papers. Please [see this page](#) for details.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Part I: Children's rights in theory ("the big picture")

Tuesday, September 5, 2023 – What is a child? What are children's rights?

Universal Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Tuesday, September 12, 2023 – The history of children's rights

Steven Mintz. 2004. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Prologue. Pp. 1-7.

Viviana Zelizer. 2021. "From *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*." in *The New Economic Sociology: A Reader*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 135-161.

Elizabeth Heger Boyle, Trina Smith, and Katja Guenther. 2007. "The rise of the child as an individual in global society." *Youth, Globalization and the Law*, edited by Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh and Ronald Kassimir. Stanford, Stanford University Press: 255-283.

Tuesday, September 19, 2023 – The best interests of the child

General comment No. 14 (2013) On the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration.

Leslie Wang. 2010 "Importing Western childhoods into a Chinese state-run orphanage." *Qualitative Sociology* 33: 137-159.

Annette Lareau. 2002. "Invisible inequality: Social class and childrearing in black families and white families." *American Sociological Review*: 747-776.

Tuesday, September 26, 2023 – Children's rights and dignity

Allison Pugh. 2009. *Longing and belonging: Parents, children, and consumer culture*. Univ of California Press, 2009. Chapter 3. "Making Do: Children and the Economy of Dignity."

Emir Estrada and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. 2011. "Intersectional dignities: Latino immigrant street vendor youth in Los Angeles." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 40.1: 102-131.

Freedon Oeur. 2016. "Recognizing dignity: Young black men growing up in an era of surveillance." *Socius* 2: 2378023116633712.

Tuesday, October 3, 2023 – Studying children's rights

William Corsaro. 2018. "Studying Children and Childhood." In *The Sociology of Childhood*. Los Angeles: Sage. Pp. 47-64.

Angela Veale. 2005. "Creative methodologies in participatory research with children." In *Researching Children's Experiences: Approaches and Methods* (Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan, eds). London: Sage. Pp. 253-272.

Tuesday, October 10, 2023 – Children’s rights and cultural diversity

Elizabeth Heger Boyle. 2005. *Female genital cutting: Cultural conflict in the global community*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter 7 and 8.

Peggy Levitt and Sally Merry. 2009. "Vernacularization on the ground: local uses of global women's rights in Peru, China, India and the United States." *Global Networks* 9.4: 441-461.

Tuesday, October 17, 2023 – Backlash to children’s rights

* *Research proposal due*

Lainie Rutkow and Joshua T. Lozman. 2006. "Suffer the children: A call for United States ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child." *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 19: 161.

Richard G. Wilkins et al. 2003. "Why the United States should not ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child." *Saint Louis University Public Law Review* 22: 411.

Part II: Children’s rights in practice (“the granular approach”)

Tuesday, October 24, 2023 – Children’s rights in everyday life - education

Jessica McCrory Calarco. 2011. "'I need help!': Social class and children’s help-seeking in elementary school." *American Sociological Review* 76.6: 862-882.

Peter Francis Harvey. 2023. "'Everyone Thinks They’re Special’: How Schools Teach Children Their Social Station." *American Sociological Review* 88.3: 493-521.

Michaela Musto. 2019. "Brilliant or bad: The gendered social construction of exceptionalism in early adolescence." *American Sociological Review* 84.3: 369-393.

Tuesday, October 31, 2023 – Children’s rights in everyday life - play

William Corsaro. "Interpretive reproduction in children's role play." *Childhood* 1.2 (1993): 64-74.

Michael Messner. 2000. "Barbie girls versus sea monsters: Children constructing gender." *Gender & Society* 14.6 (2000): 765-784.

Matthew Rafalow. 2018. "Disciplining play: Digital youth culture as capital at school." *American Journal of Sociology* 123.5: 1416-1452.

Tuesday, November 7, 2023 – Child provision rights – health and survival

Alice Fothergill and Lori Peek. 2015. *Children of Katrina*. Austin: University of Texas Press. Chapters 1 and 2.

Tuesday, November 14, 2023 – Child protection rights – work

Lisa Sun-Hee Park. 2001. "Between Adulthood and Childhood: The boundary work of immigrant entrepreneurial children." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* (2001): 114-135.

Hilary Levey. 2009. "Pageant princesses and math whizzes: Understanding children's activities as a form of children's work." *Childhood* 16.2 (2009): 195-212.

Namratha Ramanan, Peter Adriaenssens, Ilse Derluyn, and Lucia De Haene. 2021. "'The mother I was born to or the one I worked for': An exploratory study on family separation in live-in child domestic workers in Karnataka, India." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 117: 105081.

Tuesday, November 21, 2023 – Child protection rights – freedom from violence

Anna Georgsson, Kjerstin Almqvist, and Anders G. Broberg. 2011. "Naming the unmentionable: How children exposed to intimate partner violence articulate their experiences." *Journal of Family Violence* 26.2: 117-129.

Caitlin Daniel. 2015. "Changing Childrearing Beliefs Among Indigenous Rural-to-Urban Migrants in El Alto, Bolivia." *Sociological Forum*. Vol. 30. No. 4.

Frank Edwards. 2016. "Saving children, controlling families: Punishment, redistribution, and child protection." *American Sociological Review* 81.3 (2016): 575-595.

Tuesday, November 28, 2023 – Youth participation in social movements

General Comment No. 12 (2009) The right of the child to be heard

Emily Bent. 2019. "Unfiltered and unapologetic: March For Our Lives and the political boundaries of age." *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 11.2: 55-73.

Jessica Taft. 2015. "'Adults talk too much': Intergenerational dialogue and power in the Peruvian movement of working children." *Childhood* 22.4: 460-473.

Tuesday, December 5, 2023 – Youth participation and activist icons

* *Research memo due*

Patrick D. Murphy. 2021. "Speaking for the youth, speaking for the planet: Greta Thunberg and the representational politics of eco-celebrity." *Popular Communication* 19.3: 193-206.

Thomas Olesen. 2016. "Malala and the politics of global iconicity." *The British Journal of Sociology* 67.2: 307-327.

Friday, December 15, 2023 – Final paper due