

THE HONORS DISTINCTION



Jordan Packer

What's an honors program?

- Educational stratification
 - Secondary school tracking comparison
 - Track advantages
 - Honors programs & tracking
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“When do you stop spoon feeding? Answer: Today”



MY RESEARCH QUESTION

**What role does the honors program play
in the reproduction of inequality?**

METHODOLOGY

- 3 honors programs in different disciplines
 - interdisciplinary, social science, humanities
 - Observation in the programs (~40 hrs)
 - Questionnaires
 - Honors & non-honors students
 - 15 in-depth interviews
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FINDINGS

- Capital
- Identity

CAPITAL

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Humanities course observation:

In class, as Tevan and Max talk about their research interests, Max offers to give Tevan the contact information of a graduate student in Tevan's field. Tevan excitedly responds, "Wow, we just networked."

CULTURAL CAPITAL

Social science course observation:

The librarian presented the research page she created for their course, with links to tests and measures, articles, and other resources. Learning about this resource led to a whole-class sigh and someone uttering, "I wish I'd known about this."

THE “EASY A” EFFECT

Prof. Weston (interdisciplinary):

This is a critical year, they are applying for graduate school...

The average for this class is going to be an A-...but realistically, you know, probably goes down at least half a notch for some of the folks, falling down into the C category...

And how do you deal with that in this setting, without being the bad meanie that's ruining their lives?

IDENTITY

EFFORT

“we are all strivers”

“we are hard-working”

“really high-achieving, high-effort students”

PERCEPTION OF NON-HONORS

Tevan (humanities):

They're the kind of students who are like 'I got a B on this final, perfect, that's what I wanted.'

UPSHOTS

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- Capital advantages
 - Honors students are *different* from other students
 - Self-fulfilling prophecy
 - Long-term, lasting inequalities
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REPRODUCTION OF INEQUALITY

Those who consider themselves “high achieving” thrive, while those who do not consider themselves “high achieving” cannot access the same resources.

CONCLUSION

**What role does the honors program play
in the reproduction of inequality?**

FUTURE RESEARCH

- More qualitative methodologies
- Other universities and honors structures
- Observation of non-honors

THANKS!

Special thanks to:

Sociology Honors Program director, Jeff Haydu

My thesis advisor, Kevin Lewis

The Sociology Honors Cohort