

Research Statement

Yolanda Anyon

Areas of expertise. My work is organized around three areas of inquiry: racial and ethnic disparities in children's services, school-based interventions and positive youth development programs. These interests have roots in my early experiences working with adolescents in urban high schools. There, I gained insight into the (too often negative) role of public institutions in shaping the life outcomes of vulnerable youth, from tracking in education to racial profiling in the criminal justice system. Such observations of inequality led me to pursue interdisciplinary degrees in ethnic studies and social welfare. I have built a strong funding and publication record through community research collaborations that capitalize on my direct service experiences, knowledge of social theory, and training in advanced qualitative and quantitative methods. These collaborations also provided me with exciting opportunities to translate my research into practice.

Theoretical frameworks. My dissertation research examines patterns of service use by race in school-based health and social services, considering the influence of school context on youth access. This attention to the role of context on individual and collective action builds on my qualifying exam field of organization theory, in which I emphasized institutional and social reproduction frameworks. In a piece I published in the *Journal of Human Behavior and the Social Environment*, I used these sociological theories to explain racial and ethnic disproportionalities in special education. My recent article in the *Children and Youth Services Review* drew on this theoretical base to develop a typology of policy interventions aimed at reducing the overrepresentation of African American youth in child welfare services. I presented this typology as a pedagogical tool for child welfare policy analysis at the 2011 Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education.

Dissertation research. In my dissertation, I address issues of race in health and social services offered in educational settings, where much of my clinical and community practice has taken place. The provision of these programs in schools is an increasingly popular strategy to improve youths' access to care. Over the last fifteen years, the number of school-based health centers in the United States grew by 650%. Scholars and advocates have long argued that intensive, school-based support services are essential for the success of low income students of color. My own experience in the field confirms that teachers, social workers and parents are all better positioned to support the success of vulnerable children when schools serve as a coordinated hub for healthcare, youth development, and community programs. Yet, little is known about the actual dynamics of service use in educational settings, particularly across race and ethnicity. This is surprising, given that improved access for historically underserved minority groups is a frequent rationale for providing support services in schools.

The site for my dissertation study is a city-county-district collaborative called the Wellness Initiative. The Initiative funds and coordinates health education, medical, youth development, counseling, and case management services for San Francisco high school students. My analysis of administrative data reveals that Black and Latino students are significantly overrepresented in these school-based services, whereas Asian youth are underrepresented, relative to White youth. These racial differences are largely driven by student representation in individual counseling services. Using epidemiological data, I found these patterns were only partially explained by the varied prevalence of self-reported depressive symptoms and risk-taking behaviors across groups.

To identify potential mechanisms underlying these patterns, I conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with Chinese American students, who are the largest Asian ethnic group in San Francisco. These youth revealed that teacher referrals and peer dynamics between racial groups were salient factors in their decisions to seek help from their school health programs. Chinese American students reported they were uncomfortable utilizing services because they did not identify with program participants. They viewed the population of service users, predominantly Black and Latino

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youth, as “troublemakers” who engaged in risky behaviors and did not share the health or psychosocial concerns of Chinese American students. In contrast, Chinese American youth experienced teacher referrals as a form of care and concern from an adult role model that was helpful in overcoming cultural and social barriers to seeking treatment. An article summarizing these findings is currently under review at the *Journal of School Health* and served as the basis for several professional development workshops I facilitated with school and program staff in San Francisco.

Building on this qualitative work, I tested the hypothesis that students’ use of school-based programs is influenced by teacher referrals and the racial composition of the student body. I created a nested dataset linking student- and school-level data from fifteen sites in San Francisco. I modeled this data using clustered logistic regression and found that staff referral practices and school composition are significantly related to students’ likelihood of service use. However, at the subgroup level, referral rates are only significantly associated with Black and Latino youths’ access, suggesting teachers may be overlooking the needs of Asian students. My dissertation illustrates that schools are not neutral settings for service delivery; their contexts shape adolescents’ pathways into services and must be taken into account when developing outreach and enrollment systems. These findings also extend institutional and ecological theories of help-seeking by demonstrating that social and organizational contexts shape service utilization.

Research trajectory. My dissertation draws on an extensive database I built with five years of student- and school-level information from the Wellness Initiative. If I have the opportunity to work at University of Michigan, I would publish from this data as I build new partnerships with faculty and local community agencies. My first post-dissertation project will consider the influence of other contextual influences on service use, such as ethnic-specific outreach programs.

Beyond the data I collected for my dissertation, I recently submitted a proposal to the Stuart Foundation to further study referral routines by analyzing completed referral forms. In the next year, I will also have the opportunity to examine whether student outcomes, such as attendance, disciplinary incidents and academic performance, vary by students’ race, depending on the types of services they receive and school contextual features. This research is part of a long-term effort with the Wellness Initiative and San Francisco Unified School District to link student service use and educational outcome data at the school and individual level. We have applied for funding from the Institute of Education Sciences to support this research, which I would be able to conduct in Michigan. In an article currently under review in *Urban Education*, my co-author and I reviewed the literature on comprehensive student support programs, laying out the conceptual foundation for the project. We argue that services exclusively targeting individual youth will have weaker outcomes than group interventions addressing the cultural and developmental mismatches between schools and students that contribute to youths’ problem behaviors. We will test this proposition empirically using data from the Wellness Initiative and participating schools.

As a junior faculty member, I would also draw on my expertise in developing community partnerships to build new relationships with local schools and youth serving agencies where I could continue to conduct research on racial disparities, positive youth development and school-based interventions. I would extend these lines of inquiry through interdisciplinary projects with social work and education faculty at University of Michigan. My longer term goal is to develop a proposal for an investigator-initiated research grant on youth settings from the William T. Grant Foundation. If I have the opportunity to join the School of Social Work, I hope to add to the faculty’s exceptional record of funded research that fuels innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to addressing contemporary social issues.