

tations that evolved as a means of trimming energy demand, and modern medicine is stuck with treating the symptoms. There is thus “no silver bullet,” says Lieberman, that will cure them all. And exercise itself stands against two million years of human evolution screaming, “Don’t do it!” That is why getting people to exercise is often so difficult.

Lieberman returns to the hunter-gatherer model in dissecting the motivations for activity, which he describes in terms of carrots and sticks. For a Kalahari bushman, who travels five to 10 miles a day over the course of four to six hours, the reward is food. But humans also “evolved with a very large stick: if you *didn’t* exercise, you had nothing to eat.” Exercise was mandatory. For many humans today, he points out, there are very few incentives and no penalties.

One way to fix that as a society, he reasons, is “to figure out ways to make activity more fun for more people, and the way to make it fun is to make it social.” Lieberman encourages investment in community sports, ranging from soccer teams to fun runs. He decries the fact that “we spend less than 5 percent of our national healthcare budget on prevention” when “more than 70 percent of all diseases are preventable.”

But are carrots enough? Within the University, Lieberman has an idea inspired by evolution, and best described as *compelling*, that “might start a firestorm.” Given its long history of research demonstrating massive reductions in rates of morbidity and mortality among alumni who exercise, he says, Harvard “needs to reopen a discussion about...a physical-education requirement.” Surveys of undergraduates by Harvard University Health Services (HUHS) have

shown that very few students who are not athletes on a team get sufficient exercise, and that a quarter are sedentary. Furthermore, says HUHS director Paul Barreira, the same surveys show that students’ own sense of health and well-being tracks the amount of exercise they report getting. Those with the most depression and anxiety also get the least exercise. The happiest students get the most.

The Faculty of Arts and Sciences voted Harvard’s physical-education requirement “out of existence in the 1970s,” says Barreira. Any new requirement would have to respect students’ differing backgrounds, and those who have disabilities, Lieberman says. But “if ever there was a coercive environment it is a university,” he continues. “Faculty spend hours dreaming up new ways to compel students. We have all kinds of requirements in language, writing, math, and various mandatory courses within departments because we think they are beneficial for our students. Given the correlation between the mind and the body, how is a physical-education requirement any different?”

The most common critique Lieberman hears for this idea is that students don’t have the time to exercise. “But study after study shows that there is actually no trade-off in time because people who get more physical activity have better concentration, their memories are better, they focus better,” he adds. “So the time spent exercising is not time lost, but returned in spades. And not only in the short term, but also in the long term. Shouldn’t we care about the long-term mental and physical health of our students? Just giving people information is not enough. As a University—as a commu-

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nity—we need to ask ourselves whether or not we should help each other do what most of us want to do already: be more physically active.”

—JONATHAN SHAW

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BRIDGING BACKGROUNDS

Aiding the “Doubly Disadvantaged”

SEEMINGLY IN UNISON, elite colleges like Harvard have in the last decade opened their doors to more students from poor families than ever before. Eighteen percent of today’s Harvard undergraduates receive federal Pell Grants (commonly used as a proxy for low-income status), up from 10 percent in 2004. Such progressive admission policies, aside from their

obvious social benefits, have diversified the college experience at schools like Harvard (whose student bodies remain overwhelmingly wealthy). They’ve also forced colleges to learn, sometimes uncomfortably, that creating a more economically diverse student body can’t just be a matter of recruiting more economically disadvantaged students. It also must mean accommodating them.

Scholars in education and sociology have observed generally that low-income college students often feel culturally alienated from their better-off peers, fear approaching professors, and lack the experience to navigate elite social networks. Sociologist Anthony Jack, Ph.D. ’16, a Junior Fellow with a pending appointment at the Graduate School of Education, has begun to complicate this story.



Anthony Jack is interested in diversity among low-income students.

Jack emerged as a young leader in the study of inequality in the last year, with his work on the diversity *among* students from poor families. His theory splits low-income students into two classes: the “privileged poor”—those who attended private, well-resourced high schools—and the “doubly disadvantaged,” who went to public high schools. Poor undergraduates at selective schools come disproportionately from the first group, thanks to what Jack calls “an institutionalized pipeline through private education that begins at the very beginning of high school.” Think schools like Exeter and St. Paul’s.

Until recently, he argues, scholars have ignored this pipeline. (Jack, who counts himself among the privileged poor, went to Gulliver Preparatory School in Miami on a scholarship before attending Amherst College.) Students from this group are socialized among wealthier peers and better prepared for college-level work, he says; they become close with their teachers and learn to seek help from authority figures. For his recent paper in *Sociology of Education*, asking how privileged poor and doubly disadvantaged students differ in their strategies for engaging with professors, he interviewed 89 black and Latino students at an elite university in the Northeast; 20 were classed as privileged poor, 42 as doubly disadvantaged, and 27 from the middle and upper classes. (Rather than ask students directly about

family income, he determined low-income status based on a combination of their financial-aid awards, whether their parents had gone to college, and whether their families received public aid. Students whose parents had graduated from college were automatically considered middle class, though this assumption is debatable.)

Poor students who attended private schools patterned with middle-class students: both groups reported feeling at ease about reaching out to professors, advisers,

“I was surprised by how meritocratic the doubly disadvantaged were, even though they were least likely to benefit from it.”

and other authority figures, behaviors they said they brought with them from high school. “Since my high school had mandatory tutorial hours for teachers,” one student said, “I was like, ‘If I need help here, I’ll just go to office hours.’” Help-seeking, Jack suggests, “is a mechanism through which students gain access to institutional resources.” The privileged poor feel entitled to professors’ time in a way that poor students from public high schools don’t. The latter weren’t merely uncomfortable interacting with professors one-on-one; many also believed the way to succeed was simply to work hard, without trying to curry favor with their superiors. “I was surprised,” Jack says, “by how

meritocratic the doubly disadvantaged were, even though they were least likely to benefit from it. They would say, ‘I’ll succeed if I keep my head down and do good work, not networking.’”

The immediate implications of his research are obvious, Jack argues. Colleges need to become much better at accounting for the backgrounds of disadvantaged students. Harvard, for example, might create a summer “bridge” program, as other schools have done, to help less-prepared students transition to the norms of college life. A broader and more difficult cultural shift must also occur: professors must understand what is involved in working with students who may have been discouraged from approaching teachers, or who don’t know that challenging accepted ideas is part of the academic process.

More broadly, though, Jack sees the story of privileged poor and doubly disadvantaged students as a story about the breakdown of public education. Poor children shouldn’t need to gain arbitrary access to a prep school, and exit the public system, to get a suitable education; educational resources ought to be democratized. That the privileged poor students in his study patterned so closely with their better-off fellows may indicate something encouraging about children’s resilience: disadvantaged students can perform like their wealthy peers, given the right education and socialization.

“I’m still coming to terms with what it means to make recommendations for policy,” Jack says, commenting on the limitations of his work. His preliminary paper relied on qualitative interviews with just a few dozen students of color at one college. What about the experiences of poor white students, he asks, or those of other races or native countries? And there’s still the problem of how to figure out who counts as low-income. All these questions, he says excitedly, will guide future work.

—MARINA BOLOTNIKOVA

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