Please Check the Box: Professor Anthony Paik Presents October's Pizza & Prof
Munching on pizza, students listened to how Professor Anthony Paik is challenging current demographics and demographic practices in schools and workplaces.

In the past, the Sociology Professor and Director of BDIC has studied adolescent drinking, the relationship between money and marriage, and domestic violence. Professor Paik is currently working on another study surrounding contents and contexts of cyberbullying. For the study he presented at Pizza & Prof, however, on demographics, Professor Paik focuses not on students or adolescents, but instead on a different group of people in society altogether: lawyers.

Though not a lawyer himself, Professor Paik became interested in lawyers for two reasons: his previous employment in litigation consulting, and his old college roommate, Eric. When Eric was one of two candidates in his firm to make partner, and the second candidate was left behind (it is important to note that the firm could have afforded to have both as partners, and the other candidate was South Asian), both Eric and Professor Paik began to deeply consider the ways that race and racism determine in the legal profession.

To give context for his study, Professor Paik provided Pizza & Prof attendees with some current demographics. The number of monoracial and multiracial minorities is rising in the country, but law schools don’t seem to reflect this rise in population diversity with a proportional rise in student body diversity. There is still a notable shut-out rate between white applicants and applicants of color.

Another form of context that Professor Paik provided was the conceptual difference of racial identity and racial classification, and consequent racial inconsistency.

Racial identity is the identifier people of racial minorities choose for themselves; Racial classification is the identifier that other people choose and impose upon them. Therefore, racial inconsistency is when individuals’ chosen racial identities are, as defined by Paik, “contested, invalidated, mismatched, or incongruent with racial classifications by third parties.”

Law students, it seems, and especially multiracial law students, appear to face the most racial inconsistency (along with their Native American contemporaries).

Race follows law students long beyond graduation. Nonwhite lawyers are less likely to be found working in the 200 largest firms. They report lower levels of job satisfaction, mentoring opportunities, and retention. Some may argue that they get a bigger salary right after law school, but they do not get the same raises or opportunities later on that white law school graduates do.

This factors heavily in people’s minds as they apply to law school. Checking a box to indicate your race may be so simple, but for people of color, and for people of mixed race descent, it defines an entire lifetime.

In America, race tends to be thought of as a black-white binary. There is little nuance applied, nor interest in attempting to apply such nuance. As Professor Paik shows through his study, this effectively nullifies the experiences of multiracial people and consequently distorts the reality the demographics are there to represent, such as workplace recognition and discrimination, getting a role in the workplace in the first place, and promotion rates.

Professor Paik closed his Pizza & Prof discussion by opening the floor to create a dialogue with the attendees about his study, which is still a work in progress, and demonstrated how research can be a give-and-take between researcher and student. By opening outlets for more opinions on his study, and encouraging myriad voices to enter the general conversation surrounding demographics, Professor Paik hopes to bring substantial change to this pressing issue.

Photography by Jediah Zuraw-Friedland.

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