

# PERSPECTIVES

NEWSLETTER OF THE ASA THEORY SECTION

VOLUME 42, NO. 1, SUMMER 2020

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# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Greta Krippner - *University of Michigan*



These are challenging times.

It would be too pat to write that sociology – or social theory, more particularly – has ready answers to the “double pandemic” of public health and racial injustice that has dramatically and suddenly reshaped our world in the past few months. Or to suggest, with only slightly less hubris, that sociologists are uniquely positioned to understand the complex, intertwining strands that brought us to this moment. But I do think that sociology in general – and social theory in particular – has something to offer. Namely, social theory provides a certain orientation to the social world and its many paradoxes that can be helpful in directing our attention (and ultimately our actions) productively, as well as allowing us to tolerate forms of suffering wrought by the double pandemic that for some of us are new and unprecedented and for others deeply, distressingly familiar.

Consider.

In a recent Zoom call, one of my former students described the challenge of this moment in terms of toggling between “large” and “small.” On the one

hand, we are daily subjected to events that feel incomprehensible in their scale – the size of the protests, the growing death toll, the number of jobless, and so on. On the other hand, we are subjected to the absolute tedium of life at its most mundane: sheltering-in-place seems to require drilling down into the smallest practices of being human; it is domesticity in miniature. It is hard to find a place to settle between these cognitively opposed states, and yet social theory has long grappled with precisely how we can hold in the same frame the large-scale structures that shape our world and the more intimate realm of subjective experience. This is not to say that social theory seamlessly weaves together these two planes of social existence – the “micro-macro problem” is something like the holy grail for sociologists – but we are at the very least primed to wonder about social processes that unfold at very different scales.

Another puzzle of the pandemic concerns the jarring juxtaposition of the most robust sort of individualism – refusals to mask, angry defiance of government orders to shelter-in-place, the go-it-alone mentality that has long been a feature of American political culture – with a resurgence of collectivism certainly

unlike anything I have witnessed in my lifetime. There are the astonishing images of Black Lives Matter protesters filling the streets of American cities day after day. At a more existential level, there is the relentless collectivism of an infectious disease that has revealed in startling and painful ways that our fates as human beings are inseparably connected. How do we manage the dissonance? Social theory offers various ways to think about the relationship between individual and collective – the manner in which our individual subjectivities are built from our collective experience, and how collectivities in turn require a transcendence of our individual selves. Again, there is no easy resolution here, but social theory foregrounds a tension – in a sense, sociology as a discipline is *built* from this tension – that is central to the current crisis.

Finally, yet another paradox of this moment is the belated realization that what is most necessary to our collective survival – paid and unpaid care work – is least valued in our society in terms of the economic compensation it receives and the social status it commands. As social theorists, of course, we have a full toolbox that allows us to analyze how we value, how we mark and differentiate, and how we create status hierarchies. We know that these techniques of

valuation operate alongside – and help to constitute – forms of social difference (particularly race, gender, and age, among other possible divisions of the social world) that have been salient in terms of who is most at risk of contracting the virus, who cares for the sick and dying, and who educates children when schools are shuttered. Thus, even as the virus reveals webs of interconnection, it also manifests the deep and persistent inequities between us – inequities that social theory helps us to name, understand, and (potentially) work to undo.

In short, social theory doesn't have pat answers, but it illuminates many intriguing questions that have surfaced in the context of the double pandemic. I look forward to seeing many of you and engaging in such questions at the ASA's Virtual Engagement Event next month.

Stay well,  
Greta

To Renew  
or Learn  
More About  
Becoming a  
Member, visit:

[asatheory.org](http://asatheory.org)

The ASA Section on Theory seeks your help to continue its efforts to support scholarship in social theory within sociology and related disciplines. Current members can help by renewing their section membership for 2020. We also are looking to reach out to graduate students who may have theoretical interests but have not yet joined the section. The ASA Theory Section is large, vibrant, and open to any and all forms of sociological theory.

# VIRTUAL ASA THEORY SECTIONS SESSIONS

## Globalizing Social Theory

Monday, August 10 8:30-10:10  
am (PST)

Organizer/Presider: Nitsan Chorev (Brown  
University)

Panelists:

- **Claire Decoteau** (University of Illinois-Chicago), “A Postcolonial Theory of Autism”
- **Ryan Centner** (London School of Economics), “Clashing Power Geometries: Circulations of Radical Social Theory and the Transformation of Centrality in Caracas”
- **Wen Xie** (University of Chicago), “Generation as Structure: Market Transformation in the Socialist Industrial Heartland in China”
- **Anna Katharina Skarpelis** (Harvard University), “Treacherous Translation: Globalizing Comparative Social Theory”

## Lewis A. Coser Lecture & Salon Rescheduled - September TBA

Organizer: Greta Krippner (University of Michigan)  
Presider: Simone Polillo (University of Virginia)

**Monika Krause** (London School of Economics), “On Reflexivity”\*

\*Note: Monika’s pre-recorded lecture will be available via the ASA’s Virtual Engagement Event through September 30. The live discussion of the lecture will be rescheduled to a date in September (details TBA).

## Democracy in Distress

Monday, August 10 8:30-10:10 am (PST)

Organizer/Presider: Greta Krippner (University of Michigan)

Panelists:

- **Ivan Ermakoff** (University of Wisconsin-Madison), “Law Against the Rule of Law”
- **Dylan Riley** (University of California-Berkeley), “Type Reversion: Political Genetic Codes and the Turn to the Right”
- **Stephanie Mudge** (University of California-Davis), “Harbingers of Distress: The Rise of Politics-for-Its-Own-Sake”
- **Marco Garrido** (University of Chicago), “Dissensus as a Dilemma of Democracy”

**Discussant: Margaret Somers** (University of Michigan)

## Canonization

Tuesday, August 11 10:30 am - 12:10 pm (PST)

Organizer/Presider: Greta Krippner (University of Michigan)

Panelists:

- **Julian Go** (University of Chicago), “Provincializing, and Then Expanding, the Canon”
- **Julia Potter Adams** (Yale University) and Hannah Brueckner (NYU Abu Dhabi), “Can Women Be Remembered?” Wikipedia, Scholarly Notability, and Mechanisms of Disciplinary Canonization”
- **Stefan Bargheer** (UCLA), “Heritage Without History: Collective Forgetting and the Making of the Canon”
- **Discussant: Michael Burawoy** (University of California-Berkeley)

## Heretical Theories

Tuesday, August 11 2:30 - 4:10 pm (PST)

Organizer/Presider: Sarah Quinn (University of Washington)

Panelists:

- **Freedren Blume Oeur** (Tufts University), “Beneath the Veil: The Du Boisian Flame and the Psychic Life of Race”
- **Fiona Greenland** (University of Virginia), “Iconoclasm as Heretical Meaning-Making: Bringing Animism Back into Social Theory”
- **Isaac Ariail Reed** (University of Virginia), “Kafka’s Sociology: On the Relationship Between Power and Authority”
- **Marcin Serafin** (Polish Academy of Sciences), “The Unfinished Project of Human Ecology: The Emotional Dynamic of an Unsuccessful Theorizing Dyad”

# Roundtables

## 1. Theorizing Polity and Society

Tuesday, August 11 12:30 - 1:30pm (PST)

Presider: Alissa Boguslaw (Coe College)

Panelists:

- **Alissa Boguslaw** (Coe College), “The Competition for Kosovo’s Flag and Anthem and the Limits”
- **David Dietrich** (Texas State University), “God-King Trump: A Weberian Examination of Executive Authority in the Trump Era”
- **Victor Lidz & Helmut Staubmann** (Drexel University College of Medicine & University of Innsbruck), “Power in the Context of Political Homeostasis”
- **Sudhir Chella Rajan** (Harvard University), “Traacherous Translation: Globalizing Comparative Social Theory”

## 2. Novel Theoretical Approaches to Social Life

Tuesday, August 11 12:30 - 1:30pm PST

Presider: Dmitry Kurakin (Higher School of Economics)

Panelists:

- **Justin Beauchamp** (CUNY Graduate Center) “Pedagogical Responsibility: A Max Weber and Paulo Freire Comparison”
- **Francisco Durán del Fierro** (University College London), “The Ethical Dimension of Critique in Higher Education”
- **Dmitry Kurakin** (Higher School of Economics) “Mystery, Culture, and Cognition: Towards a Sociological Understanding of Mystery Within the ‘Cognitive Turn’ Debate”
- **Filipe Carreira da Silva** (University of Lisbon), “Beginnings: A Heretical Social Theoretical Approach”

## Section Business Meeting

Tuesday, August 11 1:30 - 2:10 pm (PST)

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT YOU MUST REGISTER TO PARTICIPATE OR ATTEND  
REGISTRATION: MEMBERS: FREE. NON-MEMBERS: \$25

[WWW.ASANET.ORG/ANNUAL-MEETING-2020/REGISTRATION](http://WWW.ASANET.ORG/ANNUAL-MEETING-2020/REGISTRATION)

# SECTION AWARDS



## Lewis A. Coser Award for Theoretical Agenda-Setting

Kimberly Kay Hoang

University of Chicago

**Committee:** Greta Krippner (Chair), Sharmila Rudrappa, Suzanna Walters, Wendy Simonds, Chandra Mukerji



## Theory Prize

Ari Adut

*Reign of Appearances: The Misery and Splendor of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge University Press, 2018.

### Honorable Mentions:

**Michal Pagis**, *Inward: Vipassana Meditation and the Embodiment of the Self*

**Sarah Quinn**, *American Bonds: How Credit Markets Shaped a Nation*

**Committee:** Margaret Frye (Chair), Kimberly Kay Hoang, Jaeeun Kim, Iddo Tavory, Fiona Greenland

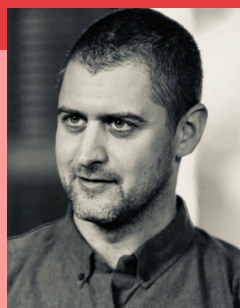


## Junior Theorist Award

Neil Gong

"Between Tolerant Containment and Concerted Constraint: Managing Madness for the City and the Privileged Family," *American Sociological Review*

**Committee:** Stephanie Mudge (Chair), Daniel Hirschman, Shai Dromi, Kyle Green



## Shils-Coleman Award

Aaron Horvath

"From Accounting to Accountability: Organizational Supererogation and the Transformation of Nonprofit Disclosure."

**Committee:** Josh Pacewicz (Chair), Alex Barnard, Marco Garrido, Barbara Kiviat, Mikell Hyman



# COVID-19 SHOULD MAKE US RETHINK WHO WE TURN TO FOR THEORIES & CONCEPTS...



... AND THIS MIGHT HELP  
US BETTER UNDERSTAND  
THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS  
OF THIS PANDEMIC

*Alexandre White, Johns Hopkins University*

My work examines the social effects of infectious epidemic outbreaks in both historical and contemporary settings as well as the global mechanisms that produce responses to outbreak. My book project, *Epidemics and Modernity: A Social History of International Disease Response* explores the historical roots of international responses to epidemic threats. My work demonstrates a number of troubling bifurcations (Go 2020) in how we as sociologists apprehend infectious disease—namely we are far too quick to distinguish histories of epidemics in the west as distinct from the those occurring elsewhere around the globe. Postcolonial sociologists (Bhambra 2011; Go 2016; Magubane 2005) and scholars of Southern Theory (Connell 1997, 2007) have advocated for the troubling, transformation or abolition of the western

canon. Pandemics should also be moments to trouble our assumptions of whose experiences, where and whose voices constitute sociological evidence and can produce theory.

To consider the wider history of 19th and 20th century global public health is to largely bear witness to what could un-critically be described as a triumphalist narrative of the control, removal or eradication of the threats of infectious disease from the western hemisphere. Eurocentric forms of global infectious disease control (White 2018), scientific understandings of epidemiology and germ theory as well as the development of sanitation systems spurred an epidemiological transition in the west in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For the first time



urban spaces became more healthsome than rural areas and infectious diseases became lesser threats relative to chronic diseases that we associate today as the primary drivers of mortality; cancers, heart disease, diabetes and others. The largely effective eradication of mosquito borne diseases from Europe and North America through large-scale eradication campaigns brought diseases like malaria and yellow fever to heel in the United States and across Europe (it may surprise many to know that malaria was not uncommon in the early 20th century as far north as the south coast of Britain) (Stepan 2015). The latter 20th century eradication of smallpox and the mostly successful eradication of polio led many by the 1970's to believe that we as a species had defeated the threat of infectious diseases.

Even the devastating pandemic of HIV/AIDS today is received as a somewhat triumphal story of the transformation of an infectious deadly illness into a chronic, lifelong but manageable condition. It is often only in the work of scholars on HIV/AIDS outside of the west or examining marginalized communities that we see the hardships associated with this disease (Angotti 2010; Arnold, Rebchook, and Kegeles 2014; Brent 2016; Campbell 1999; Decoteau 2013).

Sociology has largely as a field ignored epidemics and pandemics as subjects or phenomena of study unto themselves save for a brilliant volume in *Sociology of Health and Illness* entitled *Pandemics and Emerging Infectious Diseases: The Sociological Agenda* (Dingwall, Hoffman, and Staniland 2013). This may be because the acute nature of their emergence often means that by the time one is able to actually conduct ethnographic or targeted research and cleared the funding, ethical and logistical hurdles to conduct such research, the epidemic may have expired. There are of course, as we are seeing, also significant physical risks involved.

There is also, I would argue an issue of perspective

that clouds sociological analysis of infectious diseases. The most sustained inquiry into what I might call acute epidemics such as recent epidemics of Ebola Virus Disease in West Africa (Abramowitz et al. 2015; Richards 2016) and the Democratic Republic of Congo, zika virus, or yellow fever are usually taken up in the somewhat amorphous domain of Global Health research which focuses, by and large, upon the concerns and health problems occurring in the 'developing world'. This leaves North America and Europe often outside of the realm of direct analysis or comparison except in cases examining migrant populations, and the international organizations (Chorev 2012), and geopolitical entities involved in health policy making (Lakoff 2017). While hugely important analyses, much of the thought produced within the domain of global health upon infectious disease, by its focus on the "developing world" perhaps would over-assume the differences in dynamics shaping epidemic responses and crises based on this distinction between west and rest. We see this both in the public sphere and in academia.

This has had a persistent effect on the way this pandemic has been discussed, theorized and ultimately affected the ways to which it has been responded. No doubt we have read many news articles comparing this pandemic to the 1918 Influenza pandemic. In both public press (Gross and Barry 2020; Harris 2020) as well as in medical fields (Ellul et al. 2020), close comparisons between the two largest respiratory borne pandemics of recent times are made. While there are significant similarities certainly in the scale of the pandemics and in the epidemiological dynamics of the two diseases, I would suggest that our knee-jerk comparison to 1918 reflects also a (false) perception that the last time an epidemic of this scale graced our shores was one hundred years ago.

Such a perspective elides more recent histories and voices who may likely provide more critical and important understanding to our current moment. As we

consider the lessons we will learn from COVID-19 about sovereignty, state power, geopolitics, bureaucracy and other key objects of sociological analysis we should be aware of the silos that we have constructed for ourselves as theorists that silence the voices of those with particular experiences with epidemics. As we recognize the challenges of the health community as well as the general public to convince the federal government to respond more forcefully to an epidemic that has killed well over 100,000 people in the United States alone, we should recall that this is not itself a novel phenomenon when we consider the massive efforts of the citizen scientists, gay, lesbian, civil rights and HIV+ activists to fight for healthcare provision against discrimination and for federal support (Cohen 1999; Gonsalves 2020; Grmek 1990; Shilts 2007). When we consider the xenophobia surrounding COVID-19 we must place this within the larger context of long histories of Sinophobic and anti-Asian discourses around migration and disease threat that have a long history in America (Kraut 1995; Lee 2003; Mohr 2006; Risse 2012; White 2020; White and King 2020). Similarly when sociological theory must consider the ways in which structural racism has placed Black and Latinx Americans at greater risk of COVID-19 mortality we should position such understandings within the longer legacies of medical experimentation, exclusion and violences imposed upon marginalized groups in America (Nelson 2003, 2011; Roberts 2009; Rusert 2017; Sufrin 2018; Wailoo 2011).

While these are examples that may be excluded from a US-centered analysis of our current moment, the earlier mentioned bifurcation between *epidemics in the West and epidemics of the Rest* must also be troubled. Currently, the United States is the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nurses, doctors and care providers across the country are still rationing personal protective equipment and loved ones are being taken to hospital while their families wonder whether they will ever see them alive again. People

die socially distanced deaths in intensive care units, as loved ones say goodbye via video call. All the while far less support has been provided by the state than needed. Absent from most discussions I have seen are the comparisons between our moment today and the recent West African Ebola virus disease epidemic. From 2014 to 2016 the nations of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia suffered the deadliest Ebola epidemic in history. For a period of two years social distancing, curfews and hand washing requirements were employed across the three countries. Doctors went without effective PPE, contact tracing was mobilized to count cases and find contacts, and central governments were struggled to support the populace. Patients were taken away to hospitals not knowing if they would see their families again. As research on the West African Ebola epidemic has shown, far from the cultural stereotypes of unsanitary behaviors spreading the disease, in light of these challenges and the failure of centrally coordinated responses, communities banded together to produce solutions to halt the spread of the epidemic (Richards 2016). While a huge international effort was also required, people banded together to control the disease.

As we confront our tasks as sociologists to consider our particular moment, theorize its causes and understand the effects of this pandemic, I would suggest that we turn to the voices that our field has historically marginalized and learn from those who have experienced epidemics and whose experience could teach us a great deal. Our previously comfortable belief that epidemics in the west play out differently from those in Africa or Asia our South America has been shattered, while the voices of those who have battled the worst pandemics of recent times around the world and in the United States go unheeded. As we write the sociology to explain this moment we would be loath to not make these experiences central to our analyses.

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# DISSERTATION SPOTLIGHT



## **Matthew H. McLeskey**

**University at Buffalo, SUNY**

Twitter: @MHMc1985

[Website](#)

Matthew H. McLeskey is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at University at Buffalo, SUNY and Advanced Dissertation Fellow at Buffalo's Humanities Institute. His dissertation, "Life in a Leaded Landscape: Understanding Housing, Stigma, and Struggle in the Rust Belt," focuses on how lead poisoning as an environmental risk contributes to housing inequality. Funded by Buffalo's Mark Diamond Research Fund, his research uses Buffalo, NY as a case of urban decline and compares tenants' and landlords' experiences with housing posing threat of lead exposure to understand how regulatory structures, financial constraints, housing needs, and health concerns converge to contribute to the reproduction of urban poverty. His dissertation also documents the cultural processes defining threats of lead exposure for tenants and landlords in disinvested communities to understand how this urban epidemic contributes to place-based-stigmatization processes. This project engages with the agency of stigmatized subjects in relegated neighborhoods to addresses a social problem at the nexus of social theory, urban theory, and public policy: material and cultural factors intertwine to produce unexplored forms of urban marginality.





## Anna Skarpelis

Harvard University

Weatherhead Center for International Affairs

[Website](#)

“Making the Master Race: Germany, Japan and the Rise and Fall of Racial States,” asked how the ascent of an authoritarian and racist government alters large-scale institutions, such as immigration regimes and the welfare state. The project makes sense of a central paradox inherent in 19th and 20th century German and Japanese ethno-racial classification and naturalization practices: That both countries’ openness towards naturalization under authoritarian rule would go hand in hand with the rendering stateless and murder of millions of persons. Drawing on a diverse set of multilingual archival records, I trace the emergence of racialized meaning under different institutional and organizational contexts, and the role of bureaucrats in retrofitting racial scientific knowledge fields in a context of global empire. These findings challenge existing sociological understandings of citizenship and my book manuscript, “Un/Wanted: Race, Sovereignty, and the Governance of Expendable Populations” integrates these into a global political theory of citizenship. Moving forward, I am extending my work on comparative classification practices to the history of racializing technologies in “Racial Vision: Somatic Projects of Human Difference.”



## Nir Rotem

University of Minnesota

[Website](#)

My dissertation explores the borders and transformation of knowledge across social fields by examining the historical case study of the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. As its archival data reveals, the organization sits at the crossroads of humanitarianism, development, and human rights. From a differentiation perspective, these should be all distinct. In reality, however, they merge to some extent. By introducing concepts from world polity theory, I demonstrate how the ‘logic of practice’ travels across field boundaries. Therefore, my intellectual endeavor is twofold: paying attention to the oft-ignored topic of cross-field exchange, and bringing field theory and world polity theory into a dialogue. Alongside this, I participate in several collaborative projects. The first explores the usability of local women’s rights indicators for the early prediction of armed conflicts. The second investigates local variations in the diffusion of global norms. The third follows a different path, focusing on student attrition in higher education – the existential dropouts (published), the case of affirmative action (R&R), and dropout at the master’s level (R&R).

# JUNIOR THEORIST SYMPOSIUM

## AUG. 5-7 @ ZOOM - OPEN TO ALL

Wednesday, August 5th: 3p-4:30 EST

### Panel 1: Cities, Infrastructure, and Nature

- **Amanda McMillan-Lequieu (Drexel):** "Theorizing the Absent Object: Industrial Transportation Infrastructure Decline as Narrative Symbol in the American Rust Belt"
  - **W. Trevor Jamerson (Virginia Tech):** "Cultural Tourism and Race as a Dependable Commodity"
  - **Cary Wu (York University):** "Urbanization Theorizing"
- Discussant: Hillary Angelo, University of California, Santa Cruz**

Thursday, August 6th: 3p-4:30 EST

### Panel 2: Classification, Valuation, and Legitimacy

- **Laura Halcomb (University of California, Santa Barbara):** "The Innovation Story: Profits, Prices, and Legitimacy in the Pharmaceutical Market"
  - **Alex Barnard (New York University):** "National Repertoires of Classification: Sorting People, Things, and Ideas in France and the United States"
  - **Guillermina Altomonte (The New School) and Adrianna Munson (Columbia):** "Autonomy on the Horizon: Comparing Institutional Approaches to Disability and Elder Care"
- Discussant: Clayton Childress, University of Toronto**

Friday, August 7th: 3p-4:30 EST

### Panel 3: Performing Gender & Race

- **Sarah Brothers, Yale:** "Degendering Vulnerability: Power and Emotion in Assisted Injection Interactions"
  - **Navjotpal Kaur, Memorial University of Newfoundland:** "Performing Transnational Masculinities: Operationalizing Caste and the Body"
  - **Annie Le, University of California, Los Angeles:** "Model Minority or Model Criminal: The Racial Imaginings of Cambodian American Gang Affiliated Youth"
- Discussant: Shaneda Destine, University of Tennessee**

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## CONFERENCE PREVIEW

# JUNIOR THEORIST SYMPOSIUM

### Panel 1: Cities, Infrastructure, and Nature



### Theorizing the Absent Object: Industrial Transportation Infrastructure Decline as Narrative Symbol in the American Rust Belt

**Amanda McMillan Lequieu**

Assistant Professor, Drexel University

[Website](#)

“This used to be the parking lot,” Jesús laughed, as we piled out of his car. He and his friend Marcos pulled me into the large field of prairie grass and scrawny trees that I had been driving by, oblivious, for months while conducting fieldwork in the southeastern most neighborhood of Chicago. “There’s the dock,” Marcos said, guiding us to the edge of a watery parking spot for ships that for nearly a century delivered iron ore pellets from sources across the Great Lakes. Jesús picked up a taconite iron pellet from the edge of the dock and handed it to me. “I remember my father, when he would hear the ore boats in the [dock], he would always say, ‘*That’s* the sound of money.’”

Cultural meaning—signs and the kinds of things they signify—derives not only from cognition or social interaction; it is entangled in the *matter* of everyday life. What happens to meaning when an entire system of objects degrades and disappears? What are the mechanisms through which objects that are no longer there still signify meaning? And why might people want to negotiate the meaning of an absent object at all? Bridging cultural sociology with a thematic, narrative analysis of interviews conducted in deindustrialized communities, I ask how and why actors negotiate meanings of decayed, malfunctioning, or absent material objects. I suggest that interrogating the life and death of a specific web of objects—industrial



transportation infrastructures—illuminates the relationship between place, time, storytelling, and meaning-making.

Constructed for practical and often mundane purposes and emplaced in specific locations, few material objects construct lasting, symbolic, and layered meanings as infrastructures. Infrastructures are series of technologies that connect, delimit, and control resource flows in order to deliver commodities, information, or services that sustain social reproduction (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Star, 1999). A muddy blend of logistics, policies, culture, and finances, infrastructures are much more than the sum of their parts, as classical sociologists and contemporary scholars alike observe. From 19th-century train systems (Marx 1867/1990) to water purification systems (Silver, 2019), infrastructures are interconnected systems of objects simultaneously reflecting and producing material culture. What might sociologists interested in the production and negotiation of cultural meanings gain from analyzing infrastructures in post-industrial America? Object-centered analyses of meaning-making (see Benzecry and Rubio 2018; McDonnell 2010) involves materials that, in general, can be displaced and individualized, infrastructures are inherently emplaced in historically-specific webs of material flows. Each node in a system is experienced as a whole even when actors only interact with a part; the meaning of each node is contingent on its intended function and place-dependent even in connection to elsewhere. Thus, studying infrastructural decline enables insights into how the passage of time and the instabilities of the physical world inform the experiences, interpretations, and accounts of on-the-ground actors.

Specifically, taking an infrastructural lens grants us leverage to answer two questions: what are mechanisms through which absent objects do meaning-making work? And to what ends do actors themselves readjust meanings in reaction to material

entropy, decay, or disappearance? To answer these questions and contribute insight into how meanings attached to specific objects change as the object changes, I offer an exemplar case of transportation infrastructure decline in the American Rust Belt. I draw from two years of archival work, ethnographic study, and thematic narrative analysis of more than ninety interviews with long-term residents of a former iron mining community in Wisconsin and a steel mill neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois. Both communities were settled as sites of labor reproduction for the steel industry in the late 19th century; in the second half of the 20th century, the anchor industries and primary employers closed, inciting economic depression, outmigration, and the material decay inherent to lack of maintenance. While scholarship on deindustrialization centers primarily on political economic causes, social and emotional consequences, and demographic losses (e.g. Broughton 2015; Cowie and Heathcott 2003; Wuthnow 2018), little is known about how the degradation and disappearance of material objects are interpreted by people who still live the Rust Belt. This gap in knowledge was highlighted by my interviewees as, unbidden, one of every three brought up the rise or fall of industrial modes of transportation and a dozen drove me to a former steel mill site in southeast Chicago or disappeared railroad tracks in the forests of Wisconsin. More than merely the backwards gaze of nostalgia, I suggest that these accounts of material decline are important forms of meaning renegotiation. From thick descriptions of these interviewee stories and ethnographic field walks, I make two arguments. First, I propose that because infrastructures are objects whose meanings are contingent both on their function and emplacement, their absences facilitate meaning-making through comparison. While comparative stories are characteristic of nostalgic narratives (“a kind of mourning for the impossibility of return because the longed-for object of one’s desire exists” in the past, according to May (2017)), I suggest that these object-focused contrasts of past and present

are undervalued mechanisms of meaning-negotiation. Material change in infrastructures, specifically, can be a narrative tool “through which people interpret large-scale change and develop a picture of their wider environment,” as Angelo & Hentschel (2015, p. 307) put it. Second, I contend that actors can leverage these comparative narratives to diagnose the structural problems of disinvestment, marginalization, and disconnection characterizing regions of post-industrial societies. What to outsiders looks like an empty field to long-term residents represents financial disinvestments and intransigent political marginalization causing the reproduction of persistent, economic precarity decades after iron and steel companies closed. Stories about lost transportation infrastructure render legible, both to speakers and to the listener, the often-opaque processes, timeframes, and consequences of economic restructuring.

Bringing the materiality and meaning of infrastructures into the deindustrialization story can help us understand how and why actors work to negotiate the meanings of absent objects. Taking seriously objects as key to cultural meaning-making—even in their absence—opens space for questions too easily overlooked in contexts too often ignored by scholars of material culture.

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## Cultural Tourism and Race as a Dependable Commodity

**W. Trevor Jamerson**  
Virginia Tech Sociology  
[wjamers@vt.edu](mailto:wjamers@vt.edu)

Tourism plays a significant role in creating and determining the shape of racial categories, and has contributed to racial hierarchy because of how it places—in the case of cultural tourism—a price tag on the idea of racial difference. It situates people from different cultural, ethnic, national, and racial backgrounds into what Mary Louise Pratt (2008) calls ‘contact zones’, and Dean MacCan-nell argues that the underlying objective of most tourist activity stems from desires to experience sensations of spatial, psychological, and social “otherness” (2011). Tourism is one of the world’s largest industries, and an especially prominent practice in the world’s richest (also whitest) coun-tries. It is implicated as much in information-based expansions of post-industrial economies as it is in historical patterns of racial categorization (Werry, 2011). In this work I examine why this is the case and central to this explanation is the concept of racial commodification. Using cultural tourism as a starting point, I advance the broader argument that under capitalism, race acts as a de-pendable commodity because of how it is socially constructed to be simultaneously ‘internal’ and ‘external’ to the market. Cultural tourism becomes, in this framing, a key ideological gatekeeper in helping to determine which aspects of racial difference, or racially Othered groups, are ‘worthy’ of commodification and which should be suppressed or excluded from touristic practices. Racial hi-erarchies more generally are maintained in part through these methods of categorization.

### Contextual Background

This argument is the result of research comparing

observations of a popular cultural tourism com-pany in Harlem, New York with how tour participants write about their experiences in consumer reviews on TripAdvisor (the world’s largest travel-related social media company). Cultural tourism in Harlem is a major economic enterprise in what was once a neighborhood that tourists were en-couraged to avoid (Hoffman, 2003). Its growth in the community since the 1990’s is coeval with its rapid gentrification and New York’s development into a neoliberal city (Maurrasse, 2006). One of the main research findings is a considerable discursive disconnection between how concepts of ‘race’ and ‘Blackness’ are discussed online and how they are presented on the street. Predominant-ly White reviewers tend to revel online in their experiences with Blackness and discuss their pleas-ure in getting insider access to Harlem’s history, people, and famous spaces—especially its churches and the Apollo Theater. But they also almost completely omit the conditions of racial in-equality that led to Harlem becoming a globally famous Black community and current issues of displacement, poverty, and—most pressing-ly—criminalization facing Harlem’s minority residents. There is disconnection, in other words, between ‘positive’ themes of Blackness—more specifically Black triumph—and the larger notion of racial hierarchy in which these themes are situated. Afri-can American tour guides, on the other hand, tended to discuss triumph in relation to inequality, evincing an awareness of the ‘dialectic of oppression and activism’ characteristic of African Amer-ican identity (Collins, 2000).

## Theoretical Milieu

This disconnect can be explained through synthesizing elements of critical race studies and Marxist thought. Scholars throughout the Marxist tradition argue that capitalist markets must find new sites of *potential* profitable investment outside of the traditional commodities market in order to continue expansion (Luxemburg, 2013; Harvey, 2003). David Harvey discusses this, perhaps not coincidentally, as capitalism always needing to ‘find its Other’ (2003). For critical race studies, one of the primary organizing principles of racial hierarchy is the representation of ‘Otherness’ through a White, Western cultural lens in order to legitimate domination (Said, 1978). Linda T. Smith, for example, calls the exploitation of the racial other “the first truly global commercial enterprise (2012: 93).” Systemic contradictions of overaccumulation in the capitalist project were historically mitigated under colonialism by the seemingly limitless expanses of imagined “empty” frontier. There was always space outside the colonial project for further growth (Luxemburg, 1913). After colonizing the Americas and Asia, Europe then turned to Africa (Du Bois, 1914; Rodney, 1972). If outward growth is not possible in this way, capitalism must create new economic frontiers within the confines of the established market system in order to maintain profitability. This is a more common scenario today and tourism has traditionally played a part in each of these types of capital growth (Werry, 2011; Patullo, 2005). The concept of race is also useful in these predicaments because its fluidity—its ability to change across time and space—enables it to serve the interests of capital. David T. Goldberg, for example, argues that capitalism needs race to be both incorporated into the market and excluded from it in order for to continue being profitable because it creates a dynamic where race is consistently situated on its boundaries. This process may be observed in Harlem’s cultural tourism scene, where some elements of Blackness act as a form of symbolic currency and others are ignored by visitors who pay for the experience.

## Broader Social Implications

Capitalism is always hunting for new investment opportunity. Race, on the other hand, operates as a unique economic resource containing dual sources of opportunity—if it is not profitable one way then it can be in the other. Both are crucial to capitalist interests. This arrangement is exemplified and regulated by a global tourism industry acting as an arbiter between “positive” and “negative” orientations of racial representation, constantly forming and reforming race’s conceptual position relative to the tourist market. But it may be applied to racial inequality more broadly. We are currently seeing massive protests against the unquestionably suppressive nature of police work, which, since the Civil War, has been mobilized as a tool to maintain white supremacy—politically and economically—in the United States (Alexander, 2011). Police work, like tourism, may be read as a site distinguishing between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ aspects of racial difference. At the same time, however, many major corporations—from Amazon to the NFL—have attached themselves to the rejuvenated BLM movement with hopes of saving face with consumers while they continue to profit from the exploitation of non-white bodies. It has never been more popular—or profitable—to be ‘officially’ anti-racist. These seemingly sudden macro-level changes in social perception and corporate reaction illustrate both the fluidity of race *and* how it is socially constructed to be constantly on the frontiers of capitalism. New economic frontiers also include profiting from ecological collapse and the beginnings of an environmental and racialized global apartheid where whiter and wealthier societies shift the costs of environmental destruction to poorer and racially darker societies in the Global South. Another emerging site is the new economy surrounding the fight against Covid-19. Race is a fluid social construct whose persistence is due to its ability to justify a specific social hierarchy across time and space, making it ideally situated as a permanent fixture on these new frontiers. It is, in other

words, a dependable commodity at the same time it is the primary tool of white supremacy.

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## Adding Culture in Scenes to the Demography of Urbanization

**Cary Wu (Excerpt with Terry Clark)**

York University & University of Chicago

[Website](#)

[The following is a summary of a forthcoming theory chapter (with Terry Clark, UChicago) in the *Handbook of Classical Sociological Theory*. Cary Wu will present a related paper at the JTS].

Is urbanization a simple demographic concept, based on counting the number or percent of persons in large cities in a nation or the world? This continues, but has lost much of its meaning as global and national cultural patterns have diffused into rural areas from Siberia to the Brazilian jungle, spurring Claude Levi-Strauss to lament the loss of all closed, isolated, unglobalized local groups (in *Tristes Tropiques* – Sad Tropics as English translation 1955). Clifford Geertz and Mary

Douglas spread the same message further.

Cultural dimensions of the urban emerged in the nineteenth century and were central elements of sociology. They were integral to mapping world-wide descriptive differences via typologies like Toennies' *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*, Durkheim's mechanical and organic solidarities, the more subtle urbanity of Simmel, or later the five pattern variables of Parsons. The interwar Chicago sociologists stressed broad concepts less, adding more local specificity. They featured distinctive neighborhoods, which encouraged stressing homogeneity, to create more ideal types like the Burgess concentric zones, books on *The Gold*



*Coast and The Slum* and the Chicago handbooks describing fifty or so “community areas”. Lloyd Warner identified sub-national cultural types from New England to the Midwest and Southern towns.

This changed after World War II with incorporation of more individualistic concerns in voting surveys and focused interviews of individual citizens led by Lazarsfeld and Merton (*People’s Choice, Personal Influence*).

An intermediary level between the neighborhood and individual is the primary group, “rediscovered” by Edward Shils, Janowitz and others, elaborated in examples like Whyte’s *Street Corner Society*. These are varied ways of reshaping the simpler Louis Wirth cold and impersonal urban imagery.

With the 1960s emerged a more explicit, increasing cultural recognition of subgroups: African-Americans with the civil rights movement, followed by white Catholic ethnic groups, and national and international debates leading to new concepts like diversity, authenticity, and pride rather than simple assimilation.

The toppling of the Berlin wall in 1989 marked the symbolic end of the Cold War. It opened more nations to multiple exchanges of people, money, products, and ideas.

These heightened the salience of international migration and globalization concepts which combined with domestic migration brought further psychological challenges by persons experiencing migration. These in turn encouraged concepts like cultural hybrid and cosmopolitanism, countered in turn by reactions like populist nationalism and resistance to new immigration when it came in larger numbers. This was visible earlier in Europe and other countries where nationalism was stronger than in immigrant societies like the US, Canada, or Australia. The French and Italians voiced open political opposition to immigrant workers and

cultural challenges like fast food restaurants which were countered by slow food organizations and websites. Specific processes like McDonaldization and Hollywoodization brought increasingly conflictual reactions, including actions staged to generate immediate emotional counter-reactions on TV and the internet, like the Twin Towers attack in New York or ISIS and other guerilla/terrorist group beheadings especially in the Middle East after 2000. Massive migrations have followed, and massive opposition to what some migrants bring.

Thus urbanization includes instead of simply rural to urban, also global international migration with profound consequences. Such international exchanges transform meaning: traditional neighborhoods and ethnic groups often become less closed, fixed, homogeneous and distant. Rather they grow more divided by age, assimilation and more complex patterns variously mix within and across neighborhoods, especially in obvious international destinations like big cities and their suburbs in much of the world.

Thus, urbanization means less moving from a rural area where you know your neighbors to a cold impersonal urban neighborhood. It can now include being with your rural former neighbors who can live on one floor of a high-rise apartment or are connected through phone calls, church, and other institutions.

Children may preserve or break these patterns. Invoking primordial factors like parent’s occupation or ethnic background as explanations assumes that older children and even adults do not make original choices. Piaget, DNA and neuroscience research have detailed increasingly how such patterns vary and change with age and more. Personal taste, culture, jobs and migration all interpenetrate and are mutually dependent. Causality grows more complex as people pursue more options, from becoming yuppies, bobos, feminists, or Black Lives Matter activists. At least the leaders of these movements all explicitly reject their

own primordial backgrounds. They openly attack many classic sociological interpretations from capitalism to racism to local police practices.

Joining current discussions on urbanization in the global urban age, we recently contributed a chapter on urbanization theorizing to the *Handbook of Classical Sociological Theory* edited by Seth Abrutyn, University of British Columbia and Omar Lizardo, UCLA.

The chapter made three main points. First, we discuss the traditional sociological writings on urbanization in the nineteenth century and how they shaped sociological urbanization research until present. We contrast the major theoretical perspectives on urbanization of the twentieth century. We illustrate how new dimensions of urban life have emerged, encouraging divergent culture perspectives like bohemia, the counter-culture, post-modernism and diversity. Further, we highlight the importance of adding culture to the demographic process in theorizing urbanization as the world becomes more global and cultural factors more salient. Finally, we propose that, rather than assuming uniform global urbanity, further investigation can productively study the variability of urbanization in different places and the dynamics of how these operate and are changing. We introduce a scenic approach to capture some of these new changes. It shows how traditional class, ethnic, and religious primordial groups can variously combine in distinct neighborhood scenes. We find that 15 scenes dimensions (like neighborliness and transgression) which are more cultural and chosen than primordial, in turn foster distinct patterns of economic development, migration, lifestyle, and political activism. These new scenic divisions have grown stronger in each of the five last U.S. presidential elections. Traditional parties and ethnic groups have declined. Production and jobs have receded while consumption, lifestyle, social media and new issue politics have risen (cf. Dan Silver and Terry Clark, *Scenescapes* and 10 other books on scenes internationally, <http://scenescapes.weebly.com>).

We thus make several contributions. Many suggest that core elements of past sociological theory are obsolete. Instead, by adding new culturally-based scenes, we provide a new way to synthesize centuries of urbanization (and other) theories based on historical changes of what is urban. Second, we illustrate how to identify more subtle and specific dimensions of urbanization than most work using more narrow demographic concepts and data. We capture these changes by considering a broader range of cultural dimensions that update the historical classics like class and ethnicity to join with others like LGBTQ groups, environmentalists, and diversity. New forms of data and types of analysis join units like the nation with combinations of other levels, like cities and zip codes. Finally, the scenic approach links global urbanization and migration with more diverse combinations and overlaps among old and new dimensions and dynamics across nations and neighborhoods to permit richer interpretation and link to other themes in sociological work. The classics of sociology need continual updating as the world changes, but often this means more reframing and contextualizing than simply discarding. We sketch this general point here with urbanization theory, but the Handbook and other recent work pursue these themes more generally.



## Panel 2: Classification, Valuation, and Legitimacy



### **The Innovation Story: Profits, Prices, and Legitimacy in the Pharmaceutical Market**

**Laura Halcomb**

University of California at Santa Barbara

[lhalcomb@ucsb.edu](mailto:lhalcomb@ucsb.edu)

Over the last 100 years, the institution of American medicine has advanced from relative mediocrity to a preeminent position as a world leader in research. During this race to the top, healthcare became the fastest growing financial segment of the US economy, and patients have faced high and ever-rising prescription drug prices. Pharmaceutical companies have come under increased scrutiny over the past several decades as mounting concerns over access to and affordability of essential medications comes at a time of record profits in the pharmaceutical industry. In this paper, I argue that making sense of this growing distrust of the prescription drug industry necessitates a new theoretical account of the process of de-legitimation.

One important way that organizations gain legitimacy is through storytelling (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001), where organizations narrate goals in ways that align with cultural and symbolic systems of meaning to gain social approval. However, while this body of scholarship illustrates how organizations use stories to gain legitimacy, it lacks a specific theoretical account of how these stories may lose their legitimating power. This paper addresses this theoretical gap by examining

how rhetorical legitimacy changes with the moral value of the industry. Specifically, I advance a theoretical framework of de-legitimacy that shows the stickiness of resonant stories and shows that de-legitimation is tied not to the loss of the stories' prevalence, but rather to the erosion of the faith in the content of the stories. My analysis demonstrates that legitimizing stories for morally contentious commodities, like prescription drugs, require morally balanced narratives.

I base my argument on a qualitative content analysis of 83 Congressional hearings transcripts on prescription drug pricing from 1959-2019. I investigate two related questions: (1) How are pharmaceutical companies' stories about prices legitimated or rejected by Congressional members over time? (2) How are prescription drug prices justified and profits moralized in the face of uneasy public sentiment about the commodification of health and illness? My argument is informed by theories in economic sociology about valuation and moralized markets. As such, my analysis foregrounds how cultural beliefs about profits and medicine factor into valuation processes, above and beyond factors such as economic calculations and organizational context.

My analysis shows that, during the 1950s and 1960s, pharmaceutical companies presented an argument about innovation that balances profits with promises of future innovation. This moralizing narrative, which I call the innovation story, is premised on the idea that successful pharmaceutical companies will fuel the invention of novel treatments that will benefit American patients. I find that narratives connecting high profits to future innovation are particularly compelling to Congressional members because they help resolve the moral tensions stemming from the commodification of prescription medication. However, during the second half of the 20th Century, Congressional members struggled to justify their support for the pharmaceutical industry as its profits began to skyrocket in the early 2000s and Americans were overwhelmed by the costs of essential medications, like new cancer therapies and PrEP to protect against exposure to HIV/AIDS. To compensate for this imbalance, Congressional members drew on other moral justifications to help prop-up the innovation story and account for an affordability crisis for American patients. These included ensuring the highest standard of safety, protecting the nation from socialism, and the need to uphold American exceptionalism in the pursuit of medical knowledge. Ultimately, most recent evidence suggests that both conservative and liberal Congressional members abandoned the innovation story and leverage it against pharmaceutical companies.

Altogether, my findings demonstrate the theoretical purchase of investigating moral legitimacy as a balancing act. I interrogate the power and limits of storytelling in the construction of legitimacy. Organizations need more than material resources to survive; they also need social approval from their audiences. Legitimacy is fundamentally a dynamic collective process where organizations must match their practices to the values, norms, and beliefs of their social context (Johnson, Dowd, and Ridgeway 2008). Whereas extensive scholarship has demonstrated the

importance of storytelling for organizations in gaining legitimacy, I use the case of the pharmaceutical industry to demonstrate the role that these same stories play in the *loss* of legitimacy. Ultimately, my analysis demonstrates the stickiness of resonant narratives and demonstrates how the process of de-legitimation is tied not to the loss of the stories' prevalence, but the erosion of faith in the content of the stories.

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## National Repertoires of Classification: Sorting People, Things, and Ideas in France and the United States

**Alex Barnard**  
New York University  
[Website](#)

Sociologists have long recognized that classification is not just a matter of making sense of the world, but of creating it. A private company's grab-bag of criteria for ranking law schools drives the behavior of administrators at hundreds of institutions; the arcana of French wine classifications is the basis for a global market; a change in the diagnostic criteria for depression generates not just tens of millions of pharmaceutical prescriptions but also a widening self-identification with the category "mentally ill." The gradual accumulation of theoretical concepts—commensuration, evaluation, quantification (Espeland and Stevens 1998; Lamont 2012)—has allowed scholars to analyze disparate processes of classification based on (dare we say) a set of common metrics.

My goal in this paper is more ontological than epistemological. I am curious not just whether we can use the same analytical tools to explain the classification of wine and the classification of illnesses, but whether these classifications are actually related to each other. Do states that enumerate people through census categories in a certain way do the same when calculating national economic figures? Do doctors' typologies of their patients tell us something

about the diagnostic categories they will apply to the diseases inside them? I suggest that the answer is yes: that societies can, in part, be classified by the classes of classifications they apply and how they do so. I advance this claim through a theory of "national repertoires of classification."

A renewed classification of societies based on their classification systems returns to an older strand of sociological thinking that reaches back to Durkheim and Mauss (1967:7), who wrote in 1903 that in a given society "the classification of things reproduces [the] classification of men." I take as my direct starting point Fourcade's (2016) more recent claim that there are three main "principles" of classification: cardinal (quantitative counts), nominal (discontinuous groupings), and ordinal (continuous rankings). I disaggregate these broad principles into different features of a classificatory "repertoire": *who* is legitimately able to classify, *how* they are expected to do it, *what* kind of categories they use, and *why* classification is socially useful. It is not just horizontal linkages between them that make it such that "although it is possible to pull out a single classification scheme...in reality none of them stands alone" (Bowker and Star 1999:38). There

are also meta-level principles that underpin seemingly unrelated classification systems.

While we can see all three principles of classification in operation through societies and across historical periods, certain repertoires predominate in certain places and times. I suggest that there is a distinctive repertoire of classification at work in categorizing people, things, and ideas in France and the United States. I start with the what of classification, using the classification of wine. In the U.S., these goods are evaluated based on an point scale and in France on incommensurable “*terroirs*,” or unique combinations of land, practices, and history (Zhao 2005). This suggests the predominance of ordinal categories in the former and nominal ones in the latter. The classification of the idea of “nature” shows differences when it comes to the *how* of classification. Here, Americans have quickly embraced tools of economic commensuration and calculation, while the French have resisted formalized mechanisms of quantification that allow for ordinal comparison (Fourcade 2011).

I then show this repertoire as it operates in a completely different domain: the classification of people, in this case, people with mental illness. French clinicians have embraced a rigid set of nominal typologies that divides between “real *malades* [mentally ill]” and everyone else, emphasizing autonomous professional judgments in discerning between them (also visible in evaluations of intelligence – see Carson (2007)). The *who* of classification in the U.S. places much less emphasis on expertise, with clinicians accepting both peoples’ self-categorization and the results of ordinal scales and measures in locating people along a continuum of mental health (see, also, Porter 1996). The *why* also diverges. French policymakers and professionals fearing that classification is productive, and that mis-identifying people as mentally ill might actually make them so. For Americans, classification is a purely descriptive antecedent to intervention. The American approach makes sense when seen as part

of a repertoire focused on bringing as many elements as possible into a single, inclusive ordinal scale—not so different from new credit scoring schemes (see Fourcade and Healy (2013)).

Where do these different repertoires come from? I argue that they result from distinctive resolutions of the tension between capitalism and liberal democracy. If capitalism rests on an essentially cardinal logic of accumulation, the French have sought to wall off certain kinds of difference into incommensurable nominal groupings, while Americans have sought to create a fluid movement up and down an ordinal scale of merit and success. These approaches to human difference then spill into other domains precisely because a “repertoire” of classification in one domain represents a transposable and cognitively parsimonious way of addressing challenges in other, less central social domains. The exceptions to the patterns I describe, like the U.S.’s rigid racial caste system or France’s system of *concour* exams which produces ordinal rankings, are also the glaring exceptions to these resolutions themselves.

My hope is that this approach can help cultural sociologists out of a current impasse in comparative studies. As Bonikowski (2017:148) notes, while critiques of “national cultures”—the idea that societies differ in terms of a stable set of norms and values—“have been persuasive, their unintended consequence has been the abandonment of country-level comparisons.” The notion of a classificatory “repertoire” suggests—consistent with Bourdieu’s (1990) notion of *habitus*—that people in a given society have a distinctive “toolkit” for classifying and comprehending new problems (Lamont and Moody 2000), one which is flexible yet surprisingly coherent in how it is used to make order out of a disorderly world.



## Autonomy on the Horizon: Comparing Institutional Approaches to Disability and Elder Care

**Adrianna Bagnall-Munson & Guillermina  
Altomonte**

Columbia University & The New School for  
Social Research

[galtomonte.org](http://galtomonte.org)

[abagnallmunson.com](http://abagnallmunson.com)

Autonomy is a central value in American society that undergirds ideals of citizenship and adulthood, broadly informs law and policy, and provides a metric of success for state welfare programs. However, we also know that autonomy is not really possible because our actions necessarily unfold within social structures and multiple interdependencies. This is especially true when autonomy is defined by an individual's essential independence from others. Perhaps because of this conflict, sociology has not taken autonomy up as a serious area of inquiry even though it is an orienting principle in the social world.

In this paper we set out to develop a sociological theorization of autonomy by asking how people interpret themselves and others as autonomous. To do so we draw on a cross-study comparison of two ethnographies with populations for whom autonomy is both central and problematic. One ethnography focuses on a post-acute care unit that works to recuperate elderly adults who are experiencing new forms of impairment after a hospitalization. The other is an ethnography of disabled young adults who are "learning" autonomy at an independent living program.

We find that in their everyday work, staff at both field sites evaluate their clients' actions and practical capabilities against institutional benchmarks as well

as interpretations of their clients' imagined pasts and futures. Important differences emerge between the temporal projects of enhancing autonomy at the organizations we studied. At the independent living program, the question of who clients *could be* if afforded the opportunity to flourish loomed large and demanded that the future (the horizon of autonomy) be kept open. At the post-acute care unit, the yardstick of autonomy depended on who the clients were *in the near and distant past*. Making the elderly "independent" required clients and staff to construct a present social identity that was consistent with their imagined past autonomy.

By leveraging this contrast, we claim that people "do" autonomy by constantly measuring their momentary, present actions against their past and future selves. We thus tap into a growing body of literature that highlights the centrality of temporality for understanding how individuals act and interact. By drawing on shared knowledge of the past and common expectations for the future, actors construct a joint interpretation of the present which they use to inform their interactions (Bourdieu 1997; Patrick 2018; Tavory 2009; Tavory and Eliasoph 2013). We take up these sociological insights to theorize the interactional process of constructing autonomy as one in which dependence is defined as momentary, and thus appropriate, as long as it can



be situated within a long-term project of becoming autonomous. In theorizing this process, we claim that individuals are never fully (in)dependent. However, the elusive temporality of autonomy enables subjects to be seen as autonomous even when their isolated actions look like dependence.

Theorizing autonomy as a temporally situated phenomenon allows us to go beyond the philosophical debates about what autonomy is, in order to better understand how it motivates action. We contribute to feminist and critical analyses of the neoliberal project of cultivating autonomous subjects (Gong 2017; Haney 2010; Mason 2016; Wacquant 2009), by showing that to uphold the fiction of autonomy it is crucial to obscure moments of dependency as transitory. Placing our empirical cases in conversation, we are able to show that autonomy depends on situating dependency not only *somewhere*, in relation to people and things, but *sometime*, according to imagined pasts and future goals. This approach enables us to see more clearly how all of us engage in the constant business of “doing” autonomy, and to better understand the role of institutions (from schools to corporations) in producing autonomous selves.

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# Panel 3: Performing Gender & Race



## Gender and Vulnerability: How Interaction Power Dynamics Shape Assisted Injection Practices by People who Inject Drugs

**Sarah Brothers**  
Yale University  
[Website](#)

In the United States, about half of the 1.3 to 1.8 million people who currently inject drugs (Brady et al. 2008) give or receive injection assistance, in which one person injects another person with illicit drugs. People receiving injection assistance are at increased risk of venous damage and are more than twice as likely than other people who inject drugs to be infected with Hepatitis C and HIV. Further, overdose risk for assisted injection recipients is twice that of other people who inject drugs, for whom it is the leading cause of death.

However, why those who receive assistance are at higher risk for all of these harms is not fully understood. Because women receive injection assistance at a higher rate than men, public health research on assisted injection has focused on the reasons for the gender disparity. The overwhelming assumption in the literature is that assisted injection practices follow a gendered power dynamic in which women are subordinated to male injection providers in a way that restricts women's agency and makes them vulnerable to harm. However, these studies predominately sample women who are injected by men. Yet, a significant percentage of all people who inject drugs receive assistance and an equal percentage of men

and women *provide* assistance. Therefore, a gendered power imbalance may not fully explain assisted injection practices for women, and it cannot explain the practice in men. In addition, framing the problem in this way diminishes attention to why and how people are so vulnerable to injury, infection, and overdose in these interactions.

In this paper, I invert analysis of the practice. Following scholars who call for additional study of the practices and processes that may constitute gender (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, Fausto-Sterling 2000, Harding and Norberg 2005, Lorber 1993), I examine assisted injection interactions by starting with the dynamics of the practice itself. Furthermore, instead of only looking at women who receive assistance, I look at both men and women who receive and provide injection assistance. In doing so, I examine whether the interaction dynamics subordinate women specifically or injection assistance recipients more generally. Thus, I use the case of assisted injection to examine the relationship between interaction power dynamics and behaviors that are considered masculine and feminine, such as vulnerability, passivity, detachment, and control.



This paper is based on 16 months of periodic ethnographic observation from 2015 to 2019 in San Francisco CA with six key informants who provided or received injection assistance and their social groups. Observations took place in hospitals, apartments, public spaces, tents, cafes, and wakes. During this time, I observed five assisted injection providers injecting eight recipients a total of 18 times. Between site visits I maintained contact through phone calls, texts, and video chats. In addition, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 80 people who receive injection assistance, provide assistance, or both. To bolster validity, I interviewed multiple members of assisted injection networks, with a specific focus on collecting accounts from both the provider and receiver in any given assisted injection dyad.

I find that in the interaction providers take a detached and controlling stance while recipients are passive, vulnerable, and do not protect themselves from injection-related harms. This holds regardless of the

participants' prior relationship dynamics, the intentions of assisted injection providers, and the participants' gender identities. Consistently, I find that if one person both receives and provides injection assistance, they are detached and controlling while injecting another person, then passive and vulnerable while being injected. I find one significant gender difference: many women who provide injection assistance perform more care work in the interactions and have more developed techniques than men. I suggest that behaviors considered masculine or feminine may be malleable and dynamic in certain situations. Instead of being fixed to gender, they also correlate to position in interactions. Thus, this work adds to scholarship that decouples masculinity and femininity from gendered bodies (Pascoe 2007, Halberstram 1998), and in doing so, it demonstrates how interaction power dynamics are central to the expression of behaviors associated with gender.



## Caste Visibility and Hegemonic Masculinity: Theorizing Caste-Embodiment in Local and Transnational Spaces

**Navjotpal Kaur**

Memorial University of Newfoundland

[Website](#)

There exists significant research that analyzes caste from various perspectives – identity, ethnicity, culture, conflict, capitalism, politics, religion, and gender. However, the corporeal or embodied aspect of caste is conspicuously missing from extant literature. The indifference of Indian sociologists and sociologists of India toward the body and the urgency to address “social issues” than seemingly “unproblematic” phenomenon like embodiment are perhaps some of the factors responsible for the absence of body from the

sociological scholarship pertaining to caste. Moreover, caste has been treated as an abstract phenomenon for so long that the perspective that caste itself is a “material social category” is not given the attention it deserves.

In this paper, I focus on the materiality of the caste – how caste is embodied, through what media and through which bodies is caste made most visible. In the process, while reviewing and building on existing

theories such as Bourdieu's Habitus, I theorize the concept of 'caste-embodiment' in the contemporary context – that is, in modern times when the traditional markers of the caste are dissolving through the blurring of boundaries in the sense that residential segregation by caste is gradually disappearing, rural to urban migration is leading to more anonymity, and there is no longer a clear division of labor by caste in most areas. In essence, caste is increasingly becoming invisible from the larger spectacle, but it still constitutes individual subjectivity which, deliberately or inadvertently, informs and shapes the collective objectivity. I contend that the body, and particularly the "high-caste" male body, remains to be the vehicle of caste-visibility and carries with itself the markers of caste – the expression of which may differ by the spatial context the body finds itself in. The shifting of analytic locus from caste as a system or structure to caste as residing within the individual bodies has the potential to lend an incredible insight into how body is depended upon as a medium for caste visibility and to the micro-structural processes by which caste is embodied.

The emphasis on the male body comes from the patriarchal context that accords disproportionate power to men in terms of what the male body may encompass, express, and achieve. However, in studying caste, gender, and even masculinity, body of the high-caste male has been treated as axiomatic and hence has largely remained absent from the discussion. The bodies of low-caste men and women, in contrast, are "othered" bodies and the "othered" is always the subject of much inspection. In this paper, I focus on the bodies that have remained unexplored and understudied in the field of caste and masculinity

– that of high-caste men. I study young men of Punjab, a north-Indian state, belonging to the higher caste of farmers (known as *Jats*) and explore how Punjabi hegemonic masculinities are constructed through the process of caste-embodiment.

### **Theorizing caste-embodiment:**

Embodiment has been historically central to Punjabi self-definition since the production of the *Khalsa* Sikh body during Mughal period and that of martial races in British imperialism. Consequently, the body of the Punjabi Sikh male has been acclaimed over history as either of a warrior or of a soldier. The context of body and embodiment is particularly significant in studying contemporary *Jat* masculinities and their hegemonic principles as *Jat* men's bodies lie at the intersection of the Sikh body, the relatively privileged high-caste body, and the landowning farmer's body. Predicated on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, and using the principles of abductive analysis with empirical data, I formulate the concept of 'caste-embodiment' to characterize the synthesis between the macro-structural world and individual high-caste men's comportment and bodily expression within the context of a caste-society with a larger focus on the construction and performativity of hegemonic masculinities in different geographical spaces. To enhance the plausibility of the concept, I start with the local spaces, in Punjab, where degree of caste visibility is the highest and then transpose the framework to transnational spaces, in Canada, where caste is ostensibly rendered invisible and see how the concept of caste-embodiment fits in these different contexts.



## Model Minority or Model Criminal?: The Racial Imaginings of Cambodian American Gang Affiliated Youth

**Annie Le**

University of California, Los Angeles

[annie.le@ucla.edu](mailto:annie.le@ucla.edu)

*During fieldwork, it was Sy's birthday, a 16-year-old Cambodian American male student. As the class is singing "Happy Birthday" to him, he threw up gang signs as an expression of his membership with Suicidal Town, a Cambodian Crip street gang in Long Beach. Some students reacted in laughter; others rolled their eyes. The teacher, a 24-year-old Latina woman, sheepishly looked at me and said, "he's so goofy."*

Growing up in a predominantly Vietnamese immigrant community in East San Jose, Sy's behavior in the vignette above would be considered typical in any public school. Asian gangs have been part and parcel to the school community and larger neighborhood since the migration of Southeast Asians to California dating back to the 1960s (Lam, 2015). For those who tend to see Asian Americans as model minorities, the situation with Sy may be puzzling. It is within this tension that I see the potential for an intellectual project that explores how people perceive and make meaning of Cambodian American gang-affiliated youth. In this paper, I investigate the informal rules of race to bring complexities to our understanding of racialization by way of an analysis on Cambodian American youth gang formation, membership, and affiliation. I argue that racialization is a valid way to interrogate the experiences of gang affiliated Cambodian American youth given the substantial degree of ethnic or racial profiling involved in the process to make meaning of their affiliation.

Drawing on my ethnographic fieldwork at a public high school in Long Beach, California I argue that instead of viewing Cambodian American gang affiliated youth as opposite of the model minority, they are in fact racialized in the same vein as this stereotype. I theorize their racialization as *model criminals* instead: unlike traditional gang members, they go to school, attend classes, and are respectful of teachers. These characteristics are rooted in cultural and capitalist values of being obedient, hardworking, and successful—values that the model minority stereotype was founded on. In a sense, they are constructed as the model criminals of which other racial groups should aspire to be like as gang members.

The paradox in which Cambodian American gang affiliated youth are viewed hints at the serious analytical problem we have in understanding Southeast Asian Americans. In particular, the model minority stereotype becomes intensified when we examine the experiences of youth who are gang affiliated. Their racialization has become contradictory and illegible, so much so that their experiences are still understood under the lens of the model minority myth despite their gang identity representing ideals that go against it. My paper will criticize the model minority myth ideologically to 1) develop a deeper understanding of race and its intersection with poverty and, 2) reveal the theoretical shortcomings on their construction as model criminals and argue its perpetuation in racial inequities.

# RECENT MEMBER PUBLICATIONS

[Conner, Christopher T.; Nicholas M. Baxter, and David R. Dickens.](#) 2019. *Forgotten Founders and Other Neglected Social Theorists*. Lexington Books: Lanham, MD..

[Darwin, Helana.](#) 2020. "Challenging the Cisgender/Transgender Binary: Nonbinary People and the Transgender Label." *Gender & Society* 34(3): 357-380.

## [The Revolution That Wasn't: How Digital Activism Favors Conservatives](#)

Harvard University Press

By Jen Schradie

How do we make sense of this pendulum swing from digital utopianism of Facebook and Twitter revolutions to dystopianism Russian bots, political hacking, and fake news? *The Revolution That Wasn't: How Digital Activism Favors Conservatives* (Harvard University Press), is sociologist Jen Schradie's new book that contextualizes the online political landscape. *WIRED* Magazine chose *The Revolution that Wasn't* as one of its top summer reads, noting, "Schradie explains that, while Black Lives Matter and #MeToo capture headlines, it's traditionally powerful conservative groups who have used digital tools to create tangible change. Hers may not be the internet culture take you want...but it's likely the one you need." Other news outlets, ranging from *Newsweek* and *Vox* to *The Times Literary Supplement* and *Le Monde*, have recommended the book to its readers. Academic critics have also sung its praises: **Dave Karpf** noted that the book is "both timely and important. The book offers a robust challenge to some of the bedrock assumptions that have motivated research on digital politics for the past decade or two..."

[Tubi, Omri.](#) 2018. "Kill me a mosquito and I will build a state: political economy and the socio-technicalities of Jewish colonization in Palestine, 1922–1940." *Theory and Society* 0(0): online first.

## [Social Avalanche: Crowds, Cities and Financial Markets](#)

Cambridge University Press

By Christian Borch

Individuality and collectivity are central concepts in sociological inquiry. Incorporating cultural history, social theory, urban and economic sociology, Borch proposes an innovative rethinking of these key terms and their interconnections via the concept of the social avalanche. Drawing on classical sociology, he argues that while individuality embodies a tension between the collective and individual autonomy, certain situations, such as crowds and other moments of group behaviour, can subsume the individual entirely within the collective. These events, or social avalanches, produce an experience of being swept away suddenly and losing one's sense of self. Cities are often on the verge of social avalanches, their urban inhabitants torn between de-individualising external pressure and autonomous self-presentation. Similarly, Borch argues that present-day financial markets, dominated by computerised trading, abound with social avalanches and the tensional interplay of mimesis and autonomous decision-making. Borch argues that it is no longer humans but fully automated algorithms that avalanche in these markets.