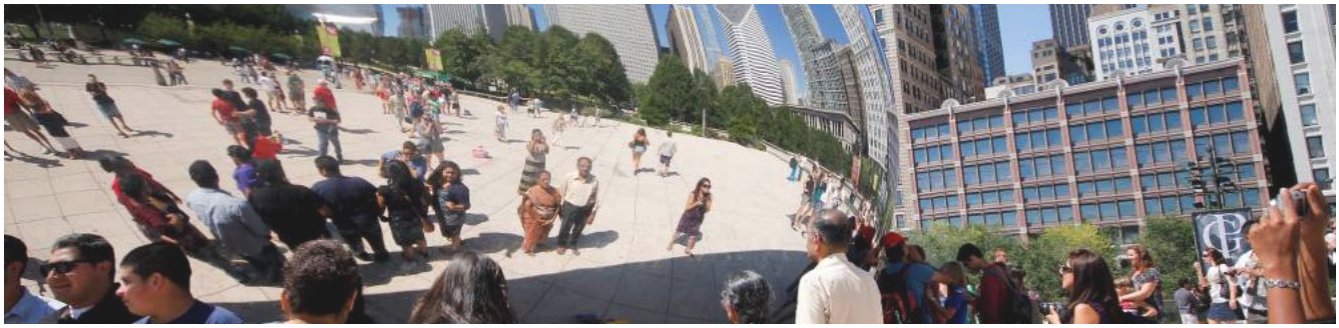
SECTIONCULTURE



ASA Sociology of Culture Section Newsletter Winter 2021, Vol. 34, Issue 4

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Letter from the Chair

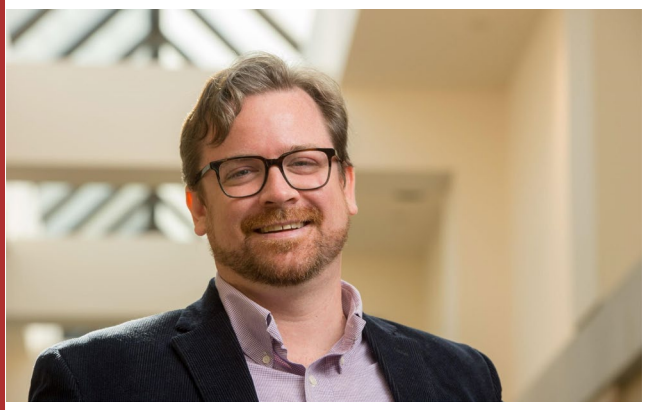

Photo: Terence E. McDonnell, University of Notre Dame

I hope the turn of the New Year rejuvenated you! After hearing Amanda Gorman recite her poem "The Hill We Climb" at Biden's Inauguration--and watching a season of *Ted Lasso*--I'm feeling optimistic, energized, and eager to tackle the challenges we have before us. If 2021 is the year things start getting better, I want to be part of making things better. As Gorman writes:

"Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,
we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one"

May you also find inspiration this year, and I look forward to our work together.

Culture and Contemporary Life Series

I'm really proud of how the Culture in Contemporary Life series has taken off. For those who missed my last letter, section council and I established a series of panel discussions with section experts as a way for our members to engage timely topics throughout the year. I've been blown away by the work of the committee to bring these to fruition. Committee chair Hannah Wohl has done an incredible job leading a wonderful committee including Shai Dromi, Lisa McCormick, Meltem Odabaş, Matt Rafalow, and Victoria Reyes as our council rep. The committee seems to have thought of everything and I've been impressed by all they've accomplished.

The first event, **"The 2020 Election: A Cultural Post-Mortem"** with Mabel Berezin, Corey Fields, and Bart Bonikowski, had 97 attendees. Ruth Braunstein (who has a future TV career hosting a political debate show) moderated an incredibly engaging discussion. Topics ranged from politicization, the language of authoritarianism and fascism, rising ethno-nationalism, populism, making sense of Trump voters, the state of our democratic institutions, and a blue pug. If you missed it, or wish to see it again, I encourage you to watch the event on YouTube: https://youtu.be/_8uPzRlSXqw. Bo Yun Park has also provided insightful coverage of the event in this issue of our newsletter for your reading pleasure.

Our second event was **"The Culture of Poverty Myth and Anti-Blackness in the 21st Century."** The lineup for this panel was superlative, including Jean Beaman, Monica Bell, and Alford Young Jr., with Jordanna Matlon moderating. I hope you'll take a moment to watch their important discussion on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIkY-bmbXJo. As our country continues to grapple with the consequences of long-standing systemic racism and anti-blackness, we too need to grapple with how to dismantle these cultures within the academy--both in our research and our institutions. We too quickly dismiss the legacy of "culture of poverty" research as something of the past when these arguments are alive and well in American social science. We need to do more than pat ourselves on the back for rejecting a boogeyman like Lawrence Mead whose arguments are patently abhorrent. There is much work left to do, and as a section we should examine the ways our research assumptions, methods, and arguments might perpetuate anti-blackness. As scholars of culture, we need to reflect upon how these narratives are tied up in anti-black racism, and what might be done to make our field, our departments, our citations, and our class syllabi more inclusive.

Mentorship

We are now half a year into the new Culture Section Mentorship Program, which partnered faculty with graduate students and recent Ph.D.s. Chair of the membership committee Blake Silver, working alongside committee members Alissa Boguslaw, Meghan Daniel, Michael Siciliano, Patrice Wright and council rep Mathieu Desan have put together a survey to solicit feedback on how the program is going. If you are part of the mentorship program, I encourage you to reply with your experiences. https://gmu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cMTWHqRgXMCNsFg

These data will inform how the section will refine the program going forward. For those of you who would like to participate in the future we'll have updates on the next cycle of the program in the coming months.

Relatedly, this issue of the newsletter includes a piece by mentorship program participants Amy Zhang and Dustin Mabry. They talked with participants in the program to get a sense of what is being discussed in these groups and how mentorship is supporting

the work of cultural sociologists at the beginning of their careers.

Barry Schwartz

I'd also like to take a personal moment to honor the career of Barry Schwartz, who passed away recently. Barry's paper with Robin Wagner-Pacifici on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was one of the three papers that inspired me to pursue a career in sociology. Barry's work was ever present at Northwestern's graduate program (as a number of fellow graduate students echoed to me after my announcement). *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* appeared in print right as I entered graduate school. His argument that historical figures and events are both a mirror and lamp still inform how I think about memory. Our current historical moment has served as a powerful mirror for our collective conscience, but I wonder whether we will rise to the occasion and whether our actions and responses to this moment will shine sufficient light on our ideals. I was fortunate to meet Barry at a conference on collective memory that Gary Alan Fine hosted at Northwestern, and found him to be thoughtful, warm, and full of insight. I wish I knew him better. I hope in a future newsletter we'll be able to honor him through the voices that knew him best.

Also in this issue

We have a number of great pieces in this newsletter, including an important essay on Race and the Sociology of Art by Fiona Rose-Greenland and Patricia Banks. Giselinde Kuipers has been podcasting and shares what she's learned about how cultural sociologists can use this medium. Gemma Mangione reviews Casey Oberlin's brilliant new book *Creating the Creationist Museum*--I'm a huge fan of this project, and I hope you'll read the book after Gemma's "guided tour." Finally, A.J. Young showcases the work of UCSD graduate student Lindsay Depalma in an entry for our "Four Questions" series. Lindsay's article, "The Passion Paradigm: Professional Adherence to and Consequences of the Ideology of 'Do What You Love," recently appeared in *Sociological Forum* and was awarded the Culture Section's 2020 Richard A. Peterson Prize for Best Graduate Student Paper.

Thanks to lead issue editor Johnnie Lotesta and the rest of the newsletter team on another great issue.

Happy reading!

Race and Sociology of Art

By Fiona Greenland (University of Virginia) and Patricia Banks (Mount Holyoke College)

The art world is replete with the same forces of anti-Black racism that permeate society as a whole: pay inequality in the arts sector, lack of representation in U.S. art galleries, and few Black people or people of color appointed to positions of power in museums. To give adequate scholarly attention to these problems requires facility with core sociological ideas about race and inequality. But given the unique intersections of symbolism, cultural capital, and social stereotypes about who makes art, the work ahead of us must also attend to the specificities of art. We discuss three areas where Black artists' contributions are systematically denied and explain

why sociologists are in a good position to critique and analyze them. While our focus is on Black artists and artworks by Black people, there is work to be done, too, on the challenges facing artists who identify as Latinx, Native or Indigenous, and other communities that have been marginalized in the art industry.

On being a Black artist. Research shows that racism impacts all stages of Black artists' careers. Elite art schools in the US are disproportionately white. Black students at these schools report feeling social isolation, having their ideas dismissed, and being pressured to convince faculty and peers that their artwork is legitimate. White peers, by contrast, are more readily accepted as producing artwork that is culturally "neutral." Upon leaving art school, often with considerable debt, Black artists face a professional art world that is rife with racism and racial inequity.

Just 5.6% of artists shown in galleries in New York City, the capital of the contemporary art market, are by women of color, though about a quarter of the city's population is Black. In the second half of 2020 there was a surge of market interest in Black artists' work, with the result that some Black artists are seeing higher income streams and greater demand for exhibitions and solo shows. The reality is that most Black artists still face systemic challenges. Black artists report high levels of burnout due to unpaid, invisible labor, persistent micro-aggressions, and pressure to produce certain kinds of art that resonate with white audiences' expectations for what "Black art" should look like.

Sociologists can greatly add to our understanding of these phenomena. Sociology of art has typically been split between semiotics, or the study of meaning, and structure, or the study of artists' career trajectories and industry institutions. Because the Blackness of an artist is frequently inseparable from her creative work, semiotics and structure are fused. We need both approaches to decenter whiteness in the art world.

Art and money. According to research conducted in 2018, the total combined auction value of work by African-American artists over a ten-year period was $2.2 billion. Moreover, one artist, Jean-Michel Basquiat, accounted for $1.7 billion of that number. Removing Basquiat from the calculation, the total combined auction value of work by other African-American artists is $460.8 million – just 0.26% of the global auction market. With recent news headlines about new auction records for Black artists' work, it is easy to conclude that the art world is finally giving Black artists their reputational and financial due. The picture is more complicated. "Flipping" – in which an artwork is bought and then quickly resold at a much higher price – is prevalent around Black artists' work. It typically does not generate income for the artist – it's the "flipper" who wins – but puts the work out of range for all but the richest collectors. There is also evidence that speculative buying hurts young artists' careers, through overvaluation and swift devaluation. In other words, we need more work done on the broader ramifications of the art world's interest in investing in Black artists' works.

Let's consider, too, the situation faced by Black gallery owners, who play an important role in boosting Black artists' careers by showing their works to collectors and patrons. At the prestigious Art Basel Fair last June, of the 281 galleries selected to participate in the fair, not a single one was Black-owned. The fair's organizers explained it as a pipeline problem: there are not enough Black-owned art galleries of sufficient prestige to make it through the competitive application process. Black gallery owners counter that they will not accrue sufficient prestige without the opportunity to participate. Black artists' works *are* being shown at Art Basel and other contemporary art fairs, mainly by white-owned galleries, and they are now at a price point beyond the reach of most museums and many Black collectors.

Is the market popularity of Black artists' work an indication of permanent commitment to equity and access in the art market? This is an empirical question, and we suggest sociology of art has a role to play in

answering it. Without a major shift in monetary flows and centers of cultural power, the surge could dissipate into a passing trend. As one artist pointed out, "We're still moving though this particular era with such a huge lack of equity that we have to depend on the goodness of white folks to see these changes being made, but what happens when there is a backlash?" Just such a backlash occurred in the early 2000s, when a surge of art market interest in Black art failed to generate durable structural change for Black artists themselves. In light of this, sociology can do more to analyze critically the intersection of art, money, and race.

Museums. Since the early 1990s there has been a considerable increase in the number of American museums focused on African-American art and artists. This increase is the result of concerted efforts by Black philanthropists, collectors, curators, and artists to organize and raise funds. As Patricia Banks (2019) has shown, however, many African-American museums face financial hardships within a few years after opening. This is due in part to broader patterns of equity distribution. It is related, too, to patrons' ideas about "what matters about the museums they support" – and what matters, it turns out, cannot be easily subsumed into the traditional theories of class and capital. We need more work on the role of ethnic museums in legitimating culture produced by racial and ethnic minorities. We also need more research on how racial and ethnic minority elite collectors legitimate culture produced by co-ethnic artists.

Black artists have been instrumental in pushing for reforms in curatorial practices *and* in museum management structures and labor relations. Why have we, as a subfield, had little to say about this important area of change? 87% of the artwork in the collections of 18 major US art museums is by white people. Women artists of color account for less than 1% of the artworks held by US art museums. When sociologists write about museums as sites of social pedagogy and the cultivation of cultural capital, they should critique and decenter the idea that "good art" is, implicitly, works made by white men. Bridget R. Cooks, Monique Scott, and Patricia Banks are among the many scholars studying race and ethnicity in museum work, and creating new curatorial practices that showcase the contributions made by artists of color.

An agenda for sociology of art. What are the definitions that guide sociology of art? Are we thinking about "art" in terms that will allow for makers and creators who do not conform to type? The singular white male genius, the societal misfit whose creations break the mold. Thing is, that ideal comes from particular sociological conditions – an argument made forcefully by Nathalie Heinich in her study of French impressionist Vincent Van Gogh. Heinich presented Van Gogh as the earliest example of the singular but highly admired "accursed artist," whose eccentricities were just enough within the bounds of a recognized cultural script that he could, after his death, be safely rehabilitated as a great artist. When white men (and some white women) are eccentric non-comformists, we make sense of them by calling them "Bohemians," geniuses, or cultural rebels – terms that are generally praiseful. By contrast, people of color who make creative works but do not conform to societal niceties have been historically labeled "activists" instead of artists, "folk artists" and "naïve artists" instead of just artists, or they are diagnosed with mental illness or overlooked entirely.

We might consider whether some of our cherished methods have generated racial blind spots. By looking for artists in "artists' communities," we risk overlooking artists who do not have the assets or, frankly, the desire to live and work in such spaces. To take one of several possible examples, a current exhibition at the Minneapolis Institute of Art features works made by artists in the Gee's Bend quilting cooperative in Alabama. The majority of Gee's Bend artists are Black women in rural communities. They come from low-income households and did not train in elite art schools. They would not show up in standard-issue sociology of art accounts of artists, and yet here they are, creating sophisticated, brilliantly creative works that continue a traditional aesthetic form while

experimenting with new designs and materials. By prioritizing semiotics as the go-to method for making meaning of art in society, we risk overlooking the social experiences of the artists – experiences including racism, that may be essential for understanding the subject matter but do not necessarily show up in signs and symbols.

What are some things we're not yet "getting" as a subfield? Recent controversies over Confederate monuments reveal widespread scholarly myopia about art and Black agency. Those monuments were created by white makers for white viewers. They deliberately and violently omitted Black people. Although Black and people of color activists have pushed for monument removal and critique, they also remain creative agents through their own works. Sociology of art would benefit by separating out some of these sites of agency and insisting on more attentive treatment of Black people's artistic creations and ingenuity. On the other hand, Black agency has been essential to repatriation work. Returning artworks to countries once occupied by colonial powers is part of a broader effort to address and repair the violence of colonization, which often entailed the desecration and despoliation of local people's culture. Sociology would benefit by engaging more deeply with this aspect of Black creative agency.

Adding new topics to our subfield is not enough. In order to build a better intellectual basis for scholarly analyses of art and the social, we need to revisit our concepts: art, creative industries, cultural capital, iconicity, and interpretation. Each of these is well established in our discipline already. They could take us even further were we to make intentional connections with critical race theory.

Resources for getting started. This is not a comprehensive list! Know of other great resources? Send us an email and we'll add them.

- Banks, Patricia. 2019. *Diversity and Philanthropy at African-American Museums*. London: Routledge.
- Cooks, Bridget R. 2011. *Exhibiting Blackness. African Americans and the American Art Museum*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Dávila, Arlene. 2020. *Latinx Art. Artists, Markets, and Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Fleetwood, Nicole. 2020. *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- González, Jennifer A. 2008. *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Scott, Monique. (2019). "Museums Matter in the Current Climate of Anti-Black Racism." *Anthropology News* website, March 20, 2019. DOI: 10.1111/AN.1119
- Zuberi, Tukufu. Books, films, and museum exhibition materials including "Decolonizing the Narrative" and "Black Bodies in Propaganda: The Art of the War Poster."
- African Digital Art, an online collective and creative space for digital artists and their audiences, with a focus on African and African diaspora creations.
- Black Art in America (BAIA), an online network focused on African-American art.
- Black Prism, a forum by and for Black artists and their artwork. Includes artist interviews, a blog, and online art shop.
- Culturetype.com. From the web: "Essential resource focused on visual art from a Black perspective, Culture Type explores intersection of art, history and culture."
- Dazed's *Global List of Black-owned/founded museums, art galleries, and spaces*

Four Questions for Lindsay DePalma

AJ Young (The Institute for Study Abroad) interviews **Lindsay DePalma** (UC San Diego) on "The Passion Paradigm", 2020 winner of the Culture Section Richard A. Peterson Prize for Best Graduate Student Paper and new article out in *Sociological Forum*.

Tell us a little about yourself, your research, and any info on your future career plans you'd like to share.

In June of 2020 I defended my dissertation (virtually, I might add!) and earned my PhD in Sociology from the University of California San Diego. I consider myself a cultural economic sociologist who studies work, with particular interests in gender inequalities. I am pursuing a career in which I leverage the skills I've developed as a sociologist, researcher, educator, mentor, writer, and writing consultant in service of building more equitable, enjoyable, and sustainable institutions of higher education or work. I would happily thrive within or outside of the academy and am pursuing both. Ironically, I learned a lot about how to cope with and even embrace precarity through my research, and like so many of my peers in this economy, only time will tell exactly what my future holds.

"The Passion Paradigm: Professional Adherence to and Consequences of the Ideology of 'Do What You Love," just recently appeared in Sociological Forum and was awarded the Culture Section's 2020 Richard A. Peterson Prize for Best Graduate Student Paper. Can you tell us a little about your paper? Where did the idea for this article come from? What drew you to the topic? Is it part of a larger project or research agenda?

The data and ideas in this article represent a piece of my dissertation (and now book) project, which analyzes why the passion paradigm thrives in a mutable or precarious economy for professional workers. The idea for this project, like most dissertation work, emerged from a slow process of finding overlap and coherence between seemingly disparate interests. Before I settled on work, I was more broadly interested in how individuals manage the intersection of their emotional or relational and economic lives. My first peer reviewed article was about how culture shapes how individuals think and talk about money.

I was drawn to how individuals experience and construct work through several sources. In my personal life my spouse quit his stable and successful corporate job to find something he was more passionate about. He eventually started a small business, Open Door Furniture, which continues today. In my professional life, students in my office hours shared trepidation about finding—but certainty about wanting—a career they deeply enjoyed. As a scholar I wrestled with situating these individual experiences within the economic context and wondered how individuals construct their beliefs about work and who or what these beliefs ultimately serve.

How do you see this work influencing or impacting the discipline or the world?

When I began my research there were many scholars arguing that as a society we are in a season of transition where our expectations of work, organizations of work, and economic structures are up for negotiation. One of the things that inspires me most about my research is the prospect of increased individual reflection on this behemoth structure in our lives, which has been structured so poorly and unfairly for so many of us for too long. I want my research to both inspire individuals and organizations to be more critical of how ideologies—like the passion paradigm—primarily serve capitalism and perpetuate existing distributions of power in society, and *also* inspire individuals to recognize their agency, imagine better structures of work, and build collective initiatives of change.

As I write this, we are still in the thick of a pandemic which has fundamentally uprooted and altered the work and home lives of millions. More than ever, professional work is under reconstruction. My hope for my research, as well as the discipline of sociology more broadly, is that they would not only help society recognize what is going systemically *wrong,* but also empower and equip individuals to build new systems. As a cultural sociologist, this includes understanding what individuals expect, and how individuals conceive of and imagine what is possible.

What did you learn in the course of researching or writing "The Passion Paradigm" that surprised you?

One of the things that struck me while talking to the engineers, nurses, and graphic designers in my sample was their enormous and palatable sense of agency and hope for their future. Against the backdrop of professional precarity, I did not expect this. I wondered where their sense of agency comes from, the extent to which it is illusory, and, eventually, the possibility that individual agency can be leveraged into collective power. There are many reasons to be concerned about the prominence of the passion paradigm, but I was surprised to also find reasons for hope. I think that its biggest danger is its deep individualism, but its individualism is not inevitable. Culture, just like structure, can change.

Related to a point I made in the previous question, my experience of listening to and analyzing how professionals make sense of, and decisions about, their work challenged me to think hard about sociology's tendency to prioritize how culture deprives agency and nurtures the status quo. Over the course of answering the questions of what work passion *is* and what work passion *does*, I wanted to more seriously contend with how individuals can construct and use culture to affect positive change. I've come to wonder whether our discipline's overemphasis on structural constraints has been a disservice to sociology and society, and stunted sociology's application and impact in the real world.

What is one piece of advice you have for graduate students or early career sociologists?

What a question to ask someone who has just finished their PhD! In my last two years I had the privilege of working as a graduate writing consultant in UC San Diego's Writing Hub. I led writing retreats, workshops, and consulted 1 on 1 with graduate students in over 30 disciplines, at different stages in their programs, at any point in their research and writing process. If there is one thing that I know for sure it is that graduate school constitutes a prolonged experience of enormous uncertainty, isolation, confusion, insecurity, vulnerability, and powerlessness.

My piece of advice for graduate students is this: as soon as possible, reject the lies that the research and

writing processes are clear and linear, that you should know how to succeed, that you alone feel like an imposter, and that seasons of difficulty or failure indicate that you don't belong. Institutions of higher education are not equitable, neutral, nor just. Find or build communities that affirm your full humanity, make the implicit explicit, support your process (not just your product), and empower you to find your voice as a scholar.

To sociology more generally, we *must* train our graduate students to have more psychological mobility, such that they can imagine futures for themselves *other than* the academy and feel confident that they are building a dynamic skill set that will serve them in life. This is one of the many insights I gleaned from my respondents about how professionals are to survive in the new economy, which is where most of our PhDs will end up.

You can find Lindsay DePalma's new article, recently published in *Sociological Forum*, at the following lnk: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/socf.12665}

Culture Section Mentorship Program: Reflections and Future Prospects

By Amy Zhang (George Mason University) and Dustin Kiskaddon (UC Davis)

At its best, the section's mentorship program invites junior sociologists backstage. They can learn what Howard Becker might call "tricks of the trade" as they develop ideas and gain insight into the institutional reproduction of the sociology of culture and cultural sociology. We--Amy Zhang (ABD George Mason) and Dustin Kiskaddon (ABD UC Davis)--thrived as mentees of Jennifer C. Lena (Colombia) in the Fall of 2020. This report summarizes reflections from mentors, mentees and the program organizers. It addresses their roles within the mentorship program and highlights themes of mutual value. We then suggest best practices, relay advice from past participants to future ones, and bring requests from participants to organizers. We end on a high note.

Program History and Intention

2020's program organizers, Alissa Boguslaw (Coe College), Mathieu Desan (Colorado), Samantha Leonard (ABD Brandeis), and Marshall Taylor (New Mexico State) sought to encourage deeper relationships than a one-off event would produce. They wished to "create connections and community [within] the section," "broaden intellectual networks," and support "the professional development of early-career scholars" (Boguslaw 2021).

Organizers distributed a survey to match mentors with mentees based on career aspirations, the types of institutions in which they work or wish to work, and their investments toward one or more of the following: 1) diversity, equity, and inclusion, 2) alt- and non-academic career paths, 3) public sociology, and, 4) navigating the academic job market. The 2020 cohort met under the weight of many challenges, not least of which arose from the pandemic that upended the annual meeting. In the context of this year, organizers, mentors, and

mentees alike found this program all the more necessary.

Themes of Value

Most respondents echoed our own sentiment--that participation in the program was grounding, motivating, and abundantly worthwhile. We highlight three themes of value:

1. Participants found reassurance by demystifying academic labor. Mentees learned about the contours of the subfield and how one's work is best situated within it. For early career researchers, it can be illuminating learning about the mechanics of a research paper or the timeline for book production. Many mentees were heartened learning that their mentors didn't find immediate success. One mentor suggested, "Just sharing experiences of having manuscripts being rejected before eventually getting published or feeling lost when dissertating can be really meaningful to graduate students."
2. While graduate students and most professors engage in mentorship within their departments, participants suggested they benefited from having a community outside of their home institutions. "When you talk to people in your own school, you somehow feel like you have to give political answers," one mentee told us. A mentor echoed this benefit, that the program "enables conversations that are harder to have with a formal advisor who has institutional responsibilities."
3. Participants valued sharing strategies for dealing with conditions of academic labor. Mentees appreciated learning about academic production, seeing how active scholars managed accepting projects, scheduling their work, and prioritizing tasks. One mentor told us they shared an "extensive system of calendaring and ways of managing mental health and productivity" that was produced "over the years, out of need." These strategies seemed especially important during the COVID era.

Best Practices

There are ways to do this thing right. Participants felt positively about the small group format, as many explained that this format provided them with a low-stakes environment for feedback which allowed participants to learn from each other's experiences, and "generate[s] a small network…to cheer each other on." And because the program pairs more than two people with differing goals, needs, and expectations, participants seemed best served when they approached the experience with a set of broad, rather than targeted, interests and goals.

Mentors should prioritize addressing topics of collective interest and be attentive to balancing time spent addressing unique concerns. Those who got the most out of the program also seemed, among other things, to have shared expectations about the function and format of the group. Group dynamics could become stilted if responsibilities for discussion leadership were unclear. We recommend clarifying expectations and roles in an early meeting including basics like how frequently the group will meet and for how long.

Group members should collectively determine concerns and interests while leaving space for unstructured discussion. We recommend creating a minimalist agenda prior to each meeting. Participants often expressed that they enjoyed the social support and connection generated by ad-hoc free-flowing discussions, but many mentees reported finding additional value addressing specific issues and challenges. Among many other things, mentees

valued working on skills training, receiving feedback on writing and research, career development, reviewing job application materials, and receiving practical advice for navigating academia.

A lack of understanding about the time commitments of the program frustrated some mentors and mentees alike. We recommend building a structure to allow participants to opt out of groups or for organizers to anticipate potentially forming new ones if groups go dormant.

Advice: From Mentors to Mentors and From Mentees to Mentees

Our mentor surprised us with her thanks, and she wasn't the only mentor to enjoy the experience. "I truly enjoyed the chance to get to know two incredibly bright scholars," said one mentor. "I enjoy mentoring," another mentor told us, "because I know that I've appreciated mentoring that I've received." One other mentor urged established scholars to participate "even if they are unsure about what they have to offer," finding that there were "many ways to be useful as a mentor and to use your experiences to support our junior colleagues."

Mentors wanted potential-mentors to consider the importance of mentoring for the subfield's reproduction. "I volunteered to participate," one told us, "because sustaining cultural sociology is a decades-long project for me." Another told us, "Mentorship from others who have 'made it' is essential for the future of our subdiscipline." Another suggested, "Given how few 'culture' jobs there are out there, it is essential to find ways to guide cultural sociologists toward successful career paths and help those with jobs keep them."

One mentee wanted potential-mentees to know one thing, "There is no reason not to sign up for this!" Another shares that "It was absolutely worth my time," while adding, "It deeply enriched my sense of what cultural sociology looks like, how to find my place in it, and how to improve my writing to make it more legible to this subfield."

Messages of Thanks for the Organizers

The reflections of mentees and mentors who participated in the 2020 Culture Section Mentorship Program demonstrate at least three non-exclusive benefits of this program: (1) It offers junior scholars useful advice and support; (2) It animates our subdiscipline and contributes to its cohesiveness; (3) It enables connection in hard times, offering respite from isolation and a chance to build meaningful, generative, relationships.

Along with these benefits, we heard a resounding *thank you* for the organizers. A mentee added, "Although my group had differing substantive interests, identities, and backgrounds, the pairing was quite perfect." A mentor tells organizers, "Thanks for organizing this and for the chance to participate. It was really enjoyable and worthwhile for me," while one simply wrote "**ENCOURAGEMENT**". Another mentor adds, "I appreciate all the work that went into matching us because it was a great fit."

In all, the program was a success, and participants seemed to benefit greatly. We hope to see the program grow in the years to come. Thanks to the organizers and participants!

Report: "The 2020 Election: A Cultural Post Mortem"

By Bo Yun Park (Harvard University)

The *Culture and Contemporary Life Talk Series* is a new initiative launched by the Sociology of Culture Section of American Sociological Association. It provides an opportunity to discuss the pressing issues of our time and analyze them through a cultural lens. The members of the Culture and Contemporary Life Series Committee—Hannah Wohl, Lisa McCormick, Meltem Odabas, Matt Rafalow, and Shai Dromi—curated a series of events that are scheduled to take place once every four to six weeks throughout the academic year.

The theme of its inaugural event, which drew 80 participants via Zoom on December 10, 2020, was the 2020 election and its aftermath. Mabel Berezin (Cornell University), Bart Bonikowski (New York University) and Corey Fields (Georgetown University), moderated by Ruth Braunstein (University of Connecticut), addressed how cultural sociology could help us better understand the 2020 election cycle. The discussions centered around three main themes: 1) the utility of terms such as populism and fascism, 2) the need to better identify Trump voters, and 3) the steps to take to strengthen democratic resilience.

THE USAGE OF ALARMIST TERMS: FASCISM AND POPULISM

Ruth Braunstein started the conversation by asking the panelists to speak to the use of dramatic—if not alarmist—terms such as fascism or populism and share their respective thoughts on the role they play in helping us understand of the current political moment.

Mabel Berezin expressed her sense of surprise in seeing fascism reemerge as the word *du jour*. Highlighting that her recent annual review on the renaissance of the term fascism speaks to Ruth's point,[1] she called for a thorough consideration of the analytical value of the term. She pointed out that the term was often used in an imprecise manner, especially within the context of the United States. When the term was coined by Mussolini and Gentile, it referred to "nothing like what's going in the U.S.," she noted. We thus would need to be more careful in our historical analyses of the subject matter.

Bart Bonikowski concurred that the terms such as fascism or populism often tend to be used in an overly simplistic manner. Populism, along with the concepts of nationalism and authoritarianism, are often misunderstood. Populism refers to a mode of political discourse that puts a vilified corrupted elite against a glorified people. Authoritarianism in turn indicates a way of governing that violates democratic norms. If understood correctly, these terms can significantly enhance our understanding of the comparative dimension of radical politics. Ethnonationalism, in particular, is a central concept in understanding the rise of radical politics. It activates a sense of fear and anxiety among majorities and enabled a mobilization of these sentiments for political gains—not just in the United States, but also in Europe and beyond.

Corey Fields added that the demonization of outgroups by white people is nothing new and that the notion of Christian white nationalism is not surprising to black people. These notions travel across time and space. The political efficacy of those terms brings about fascinating analytical questions. Now, we all have to talk about it.

THE IDENTITY AND MOTIVATIONS OF TRUMP VOTERS

Ruth Braunstein proceeded with the observation that many voted for another four years of Trump. She asked the panelists to share their thoughts on who those voters were and what their motivations may have been be.

Corey Fields pointed out that the overarching story seems to be the intensity of partisanship: "People are voting because they identify themselves as Republicans." As such, there is a fair amount of partisan voting. Not only has the Republican partisanship become more important in terms of its meaning, but there seems to be no parallel in the Democratic Party in terms of political identity. Democratic political professionals should be concerned about providing a clearer message: "This is Us. This is what we believe in."

Mabel Berezin stressed that it would be hard to imagine that all the people who voted for Trump are white nationalist. What would be important to know is who are those people who just voted for Trump for reasons we are not imagining. What are the stories we haven't thought about? We have to tap into those.

Bart Bonikowski addressed the issue of whether nationalism has increased. He clarified that the United States is not becoming more xenophobic. What has happened is a massive sorting through an ethnonationalist party. A vote for Trump is either endorsing ethnonationalism or condoning it; it was either an appeal or something that had no bearing to them. While we should be cautious not to essentialize their political beliefs, it would be important to remember that Republicans did not vote for just any Republican.

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

Ruth Braunstein brought up the fact that some people continue to question the election results and that there could possibly be a widespread loss of faith in democratic institutions.

Bart Bonikowski strongly emphasized that we should be alarmed about potential future forms of democratic erosion. The coup aside, we are witnessing a democratic backsliding. There is some evidence that courts are shifting, giving a lot of power about voting rights to state GOPs pursuing voter disenfranchisement. Democracy will suffer if we don't stay more alert.

All panelists agreed that we are facing a complicated moment and hoped that changes are under way.

SELECTED QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q: Anna Skarpelis, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University, asked how each panelist—who respectively represent different forms of sociological inquiry—would

suggest people get a better handle on what Mabel called "the stories that are out there" [referring to people's motivations to vote for Trump].

A: Mabel Berezin answered that would be some new thinking to do and called for more research on better understanding both who voted for Trump and why. She pointed out that we should "open our minds to try to get at this particular problem."

Q: Fernando Dominguez Rubio, Assistant Professor of Communication at the University of California, San Diego, asked if the panelists saw "any possibility in the near future (i.e., 2-3 election cycles) for the GOP to backtrack its current transformation into a full-fledged ethno-nationalist movement?"

A: Bart Bonikowski replied: "It's possible, but I'm not sure they will have incentives in the near-to-medium-term to do so. Trumpism worked and they've doubled down on it."

A: Corey Fields called for a consideration of what lefty democratic policy can do for you and that a simple anti-Republican message was not the way to go.

Future events of the Culture and Contemporary Life series will discuss topics that include the "culture of poverty" and blackness in the 21st century, as well as a the COVID vaccine.

PANELISTS*

Mabel Berezin (www.mabelberezin.com) is Professor of Sociology at Cornell who writes on challenges to democratic cohesion and solidarity in Europe and the United States. She is the author of *Illiberal Politics in Neoliberal Times: Culture, Security, and Populism in the New Europe* (Cambridge 2009) and *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of lnter-war Italy* (Cornell 1997). She is working on a manuscript titled *The End of Security and the Rise of Populism* under contract at Oxford University Press. The book examines the current global resurgence of nationalism and the populist challenge to democratic practice.

Bart Bonikowski is Associate Professor of Sociology at New York University. Using relational survey methods, computational text analysis, and experimental research, his work applies insights from cultural sociology to the study of politics in the United States and Europe, with a particular focus on nationalism, populism, and the radical right. Building on past publications in scholarly journals, he is completing a book manuscript titled *Radicalized: How the Right Has Mobilized Nationalism and Undermined Liberal Democracy*, which is under advance contract with Princeton University Press.

Corey D. Fields is Associate Professor and te Idol Family Chair of Sociology at Georgetown University. His research explores the role of identity - at the individual and collective level - in structuring social life. He is the author of *Black Elephants in the Room: The Unexpected Politics of African-American Republicans* (University of California Press 2016). The book explores the dynamic relationship between race and politics in contemporary U.S. politics, and has been covered in a number of media outlets. Corey's current research draws

on the experiences of Black professionals in the advertising industry to examine the relationship between racial identity and profession identity.

MODERATOR*

Ruth Braunstein is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Connecticut. Her award-winning research has been published in the American Sociological Review, the American Journal of Cultural Sociology, the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Political Power and Social Theory, Sociology of Religion, Theory and Society, and Qualitative Sociology, among other outlets. She is the author of *Prophets and Patriots: Faith in Democracy Across the Political Divide* and co-editor *of Religion and Progressive Activism: New Stories About Faith and Politics*. Her current research explores how taxpaying and tax resisting are linked to contested understandings of political community, good citizenship and morality in the United States.

[1] For more details, please refer to: Berezin, Mabel. 2019. "Fascism and Populism: Are They Useful Categories for Comparative Sociological Analysis?" *Annual Review of Sociology* 45(1):345–61.

* Information provided on the event's poster.

Book Review: "*Creating the Creation Museum*"

Oberlin, Kathleen C. 2020. Creating the Creation Museum: How Fundamentalist Beliefs Come to Life. New York: NYU Press.

Review by Gemma Mangione

Figure 4.10b. Creative Decisions Up Close, Creation Museum. p. 159, *Creating the Creation Museum*.

On January 22, 2017, Kellyanne Conway -- a senior adviser to then-president Donald J. Trump -- defended the White House's press secretary's recent assessment that attendance numbers at Trump's 2016 inauguration exceeded that of Barack Obama's in 2008. Despite photo evidence to the contrary, Conway insisted with unruffled confidence on a major network news program that the secretary was not presenting demonstrable fiction. He was simply offering "alternative facts." The program host immediately called said facts outright "falsehoods," but the polarization of U.S. politics has enabled both the championing and repudiation of his characterization. The ubiquity of alternative facts in American national discourse -- as meme, as emblem of the current moment, and as bellwether -- endures.

In her detailed analysis of the Kentucky-based Creation Museum, Kathleen C. Oberlin approaches the era of alternative facts with innovative case selection, methodological pluralism, and sociological rigor. *Creating the Creation Museum: How Fundamentalists Beliefs Come to Life* considers how Answers in Genesis (AiG) -- an American fundamentalist organization advancing a young Earth creationist (YEC) explanation of the origins of the universe -- developed a museum to promote what Oberlin calls "plausibility politics." YEC holds that the Earth and its lifeforms were created by a supernatural deity no earlier than 10,000 years ago. Founded by AiG president and CEO Ken Ham, The Creation Museum's focus is to make this "different starting point" (alternative facts by any other name) to evolutionary theory reasonable enough to a broad public. And by this measure, Oberlin argues, AiG succeeds. As cultural sociologists reading her book, we are left to reckon with the purchase of cultural organizations as sites for social movement activity: specifically, how those organizations' material and sensory properties shape perceptions of movement legitimacy, and how people mobilize their epistemic practices to promote credibility.

The Creation Museum offers a fascinating empirical case for these broader theoretical questions. I'd posit that cultural sociologists have previously studied museums across three theoretical traditions: Bourdieusian theories of cultural capital and status distinction, neo-institutionalism, and (most recently) studies of legitimacy, power, and materiality, cross-pollinated by research in science and technology studies. What links traditions one and two is the notion that while American museums have always been elite spaces, many of the structural forces that supported their narrowly catering to elite audiences and interests have weakened over the last more than half-century. This stemmed from both rising standards of public accountability from funders and other external stakeholders and also internal reckonings with museums' (imperialist, classist, racist, ableist) past. Ultimately, tensions between elitist and democratic logics -- available for people to draw upon differently to advance their goals -- structure the operations of American cultural organizations.

While engaging the STS tradition most directly, I suggest that in studying museums as a site for *social movement activity*, Oberlin's book is actually effectively linking all three of these theoretical traditions within cultural sociology. As she illustrates, moves toward engendering greater democratic participation and reflexivity in museums created an opportunity structure for AiG. In building The Creation Museum, AiG promotes plausibility politics in two main ways. First, it annexed the enduring cultural authority of the museum *form*. Throughout her book, Oberlin takes pains to highlight the professionalism of The Creation Museum's displays, received as impressive by both devotees and skeptics alike. In the words of one dissenting blogger expecting a "sort of homemade museum...cute, modest, wacky…" the museum was "slick… with exhibits… as good as any museum in the country" even if filled with "pseudo-science" (p. 188). Later, in Chapter 3's excellent discussion of the sensory conventions and aesthetics of The Creation Museum, Oberlin compellingly renders how its particular visual, aural, and even olfactory elements rely on familiar museum tropes to convey epistemic legitimacy. Her attention to how material forms act upon people to shape visitors' assessments of credibility is an excellent empirical contribution to the museum literature and theoretical one to research on social movements.

Of note, however, is that this material meaning-making is playing out *within* the populist turn that characterizes contemporary museum practice.

Consider, for example, Chapter 3's discussion of efforts to facilitate greater opportunities for tactile learning in museums; this highlights how "multisensory engagement is the revitalized currency of the museum experience" (pg. 118) promoting broader modalities for engagement beyond the dominant, confining practice of "look, don't touch." Heightened opportunities for touch make the museum a more accessible place for visitors of different ages and embodied capacities, and this is *balanced against* their enduring perception of museums' epistemic legitimacy. Indeed, Oberlin argues, this balance is what makes The Creation Museum such an effective vehicle for advancing plausibility politics to "everyday people," as the natural history museum is where they are most likely to comfortably "engage with scientific information and the look and feel of science" (p. 9). But it is also where more than one-half of Americans feel science centers and museums "get the science facts right most of the time:" more trusted, in this regard, than government agencies or news outlets (p. 15).

The second appropriation of elite knowledge practices advanced by Creation Museum administrators in the name of pluralistic education regards the museum's presentation of the scientific process and specifically, assessment of evidence. Nowhere is this strategic work clearer than in Chapter 4. I view this chapter as the most fascinating and troubling of the book, one I would argue compellingly contributes to the formulation of a "sociology of doubt." Chapter 4 relies on codes of exhibition photographs, didactics (in-gallery texts), and publication ephemera to compare The Creation Museum's presentation of Lucy -- one of the most complete skeletons documenting the evolutionary stage of early hominids that dominated between 2-4 million years ago -- to that of three natural history museums in the U.S. that promote evolutionary theory. As Oberlin notes, Lucy is perhaps the greatest threat to YEC: she offers some of the strongest evidence from the natural world suggesting humans evolved from ape-like ancestors.

However, rather than focus singularly on promoting the counter-interpretation that Lucy is more akin to gorillas than the human forms that followed her, Creation Museum exhibition designers instead attempted to sew doubt about the *very process* through which evolutionists interpret Lucy. Directly addressing peer museums' presentations of Lucy, The Creation Museum presents Lucy on four legs, rather than two; compares how different colorings ("creative decisions") of how to render Lucy's face can alternatively favor her appearing more humanoid than ape; and highlights gaps in the fossil record to suggest plausible counter-interpretations of Lucy's bones (i.e. aren't her toes curved more like tree-dwellers than modern humans?). Indeed, this is the very exhibit that most impressed upon even non-believers, again studied through their public blog posts in Chapter 5's examination of reception. As one self-identified atheist blogger admitted (p. 186): "The argument was that those who reconstruct the Lucy specimen bring their scientific bias to the interpretation… I thought that was actually an interesting interrogation of how biases influence concepts."

For cultural sociologists, the value of *Creating the Creation Museum* is clear: Oberlin explaining how social movement groups advance plausibility politics through the built environment contributes to theoretical debates and empirical awakenings across an array of areas. As both a sociologist and scholar of arts administration working to train the next generation of museum decision-makers, I also finished the book hearing the earnest question so many of my students ask me, urgently, after reading sociological texts: "But what do we *do* now?" What should they (we) make of the argument that the

progressive democratic impulse guiding contemporary museum practice -- intended to enfranchise the marginalized, and only beginning to correct for museums' problematic past -- has been appropriated to undermine basic facts in the name of plausible "alternatives"? It is easy to default here to the Weberian premise that research like Oberlin's should guide informed decision-making, not prescribe specific courses of action. Nevertheless, I'd be curious to discuss her book and its practical implications for governance with administrators working, in the trenches, across pluralistic and authoritative tensions of mission in American museums. As Oberlin has shown, beyond merely sites for status reproduction or organizations particularly susceptible to their changing environments, museums offer unparalleled insight into how people navigate a world increasingly blurring the boundaries of fact and fiction.

Podcasting for Sociologists: lessons learned from making an international teaching podcast on culture and inequality in pandemic times

By Luuc Brans and Giselinde Kuipers
Center for Sociological Research, KU Leuven, Belgium

As COVID-19 lockdowns swept across university campuses in early 2020, academics around the world shifted their teaching to virtual platforms. As students and their tutors soon found out, online teaching was challenging. Students found online lectures boring, academics found the lectures exhausting to deliver, class discussions were difficult to stimulate, and the long hours behind screens turned out be draining and stressful. But the pandemic also provided opportunities for novel, innovative, and perhaps even better modes of academic teaching.

In this light, we want to share our experience with a new teaching format developed in the fall semester of 2020. We transformed our new MA course on culture and inequality, which was to be taught for the first time at KULeuven in Belgium, into a collaborative teaching podcast featuring a cast of international colleagues. Instead of sharing this podcast only with our own students, we decided to make this into a full-fledged podcast on Culture and Inequality that could be used by university lecturers around the world. In the spring of 2020, Giselinde therefore sent an email to colleagues potentially teaching similar courses in universities around the world, asking if they wanted to join forces.

The podcast was more successful than we could have imagined, attracting hundreds of followers beyond our students, and reaching all corners of the globe. Making the podcast was an unexpectedly gratifying experience in these grim times. Our students were enthusiastic, and the quality of the zoom meetings

improved greatly. Moreover, the conversation with colleagues provided a lifeline to the international academic community that was as inspiring for the podcast participants as it was for the students.

What did we learn from producing this sociological podcast course? In this short article, we relay our experiences with academic podcasting for teaching purposes and provide practical tips for those considering using podcasts for a sociology course. We also discuss how audio in general, and podcasts in particular, could benefit the academic community. At the end, we provide some useful links to software, tutorials and other relevant podcasts.

The culture and inequality course: structure and format

Our weekly podcast course, simply called Culture and Inequality, was a 13-week class on culture and inequality for advanced students in the social sciences. It included a podcast with conversations between scholars about a specific topic and selected readings, as well as a syllabus with readings and group and discussion assignments. All course materials are freely available on the website of the European Centre for the study of Culture and Inequality (eucci.eu/podcast), who also kindly supported our podcast. The podcasts are also available on the main platforms: Soundcloud, Spotify and iTunes.

The course was curated by Giselinde Kuipers, who hosted (ie presented) most of the episodes. However, some of the episodes were hosted by other colleagues: Philippa Chong (McMaster University), Dave O'Brien (U of Edinburgh), Julian Schaap (Erasmus University Rotterdam), Simon Stewart (University of Portsmouth) and Luuc Brans (KU Leuven). The podcast consisted of conversations with one or two cultural sociologists who generally discussed their own work, relevant work by others (often suggested by the interviewees), and classics in the field. For instance, in the episode on "cultural beliefs about inequality" we matched Magne Flemmen (Oslo University) and Jonathan Mijs (Harvard and Erasmus University) – who didn't know each other -- to discuss their respective work as well as a paper by Giselinde on egalitarianism and meritocracy.

The course consists of three thematic packages or "blocks" and one closing episode. The first block focuses on theoretical foundations of the study of culture and inequality, the second dives into specific cases and empirical fields, and the final block explores avenues for future research. Each hour-long episode consists of a conversation between one of the regular "hosts" and one or more guests that were suggested by the host. For the first theoretical episodes in which more complex, foundational texts (e.g., Bourdieu, Hall, Lamont) were assigned, one of us took on the role of confused student ("the student voice") in the conversation, aiming to make the complex discussions more understandable to MA students.

For the remaining 12 episodes, we assembled a cast of international sociologists, who all happily contributed to the production of the course, assigning literature, and thinking of assignments for students to complete after an episode. This included sociologists from many countries and nationalities, speaking in a wide range of English about themes from omnivores to the role of cultural capital in migration, and from superfood and anorexia to primitive art and Chinese television. As a nice bonus in pandemic times, this offered us a chance to get back in touch with colleagues and friends in the international sociological community whom we have so dearly missed in a year full of canceled physical conferences and meetings.

Target audience and possible uses

The podcast is primarily targeted at students. While making the podcasts, however, we quickly discovered the episodes are of interest to other academics and the wider sociological community.

The podcast can be used for a variety of teaching formats. We used the podcast specifically for our MA course, and thus combined it with weekly online seminars for students. In our case, the podcast was an alternatively to the "lecture"/literature discussion part of seminars, allowing for shorter, more interactive online seminars. The conversations with colleagues essentially allowed us to have multiple guest lectures that would have otherwise been impossible to organize physically. However, the podcast can also be used as an addition to live meetings; or replace seminar meeting altogether. Moreover, it can be used by PhD candidates to get a "feel" for the field, or by more advanced scholars to catch up quickly on other people's work. Essentially, scholars provide an informal, accessible summary of their own research, its connection to other recent work (that they chose because they like it), and its relation to larger theoretical debates. This can also be attractive to senior academics who may find (like us) that the standard article format is not the most appealing way to hear about new research or keep up with the field.

Our students were generally enthusiastic and positive about the podcast. Most importantly, the podcast made it easier for them to engage with the literature and course content. Students noted that they had an easier time remembering the literature and understanding the sometimes-complex arguments in the literature. Hearing the actual voices of authors of assigned literature made the readings come to life. To students' surprise, sociologists are living and breathing creatures, not just names on papers or book covers! Here, the informal, casual nature of the podcast genre really helped: the guest told anecdotes about their research, explained why they liked other readings so much, sometimes also were quite candid about their dislikes and objections, and sometimes also linked insight to everyday life. For instance, in the episode about eating and cultural capital, one of the guests linked the findings to growing up working class.

Finally, some students also mentioned that they preferred the audio-format of a podcast over ordinary web lectures as they could combine the podcast with exercise or household chores. There are possible downsides, too. For instance, we suspect that after listening to the podcast, students did not always feel the need to read the assigned readings anymore.

Lessons learned 1. Technically, making a podcast is less complicated than you think

So, *how* did we produce this and what are the dos and don'ts of academic podcasting? We will share, first, tips and tricks regarding the technical aspects of podcast production. Below, we also share links to tutorials and software.

Importantly, producing a podcast is cheap and quite easy. It doesn't require technical skills or specialized equipment (beyond what most people have at home by now). Podcasts can be made available via platforms that are easily accessible around the world and are (almost) free.

For setting up a podcast, you need to create a so-called RSS feed and manually add the RSS feed to Apple's and Spotify's podcast library (which are the most important podcast libraries). Through this feed, the podcast is freely available to everyone. The easiest way to do this is by setting-up a Soundcloud Pro Unlimited account (about $9.99/month), but you can also host the podcast on your own personal

server or university e-learning environment. Both Soundcloud and Spotify provide interesting statistics and data on the general geography of your listenership, as well as age, gender, and in the case of Spotify, what kind of music they usually listen to. For cultural sociologists like us, this kind of data is enticing. We used the music taste of our listeners in our promotion of the podcast to a wider audience (See Figure 1). For these platforms, the podcast will need a catchy name and some cover art. We used a photograph made by former ASA culture section chair Timothy Dowd (see Figure 2).

Our podcast episodes were recorded remotely. Although using a studio typically provides the best quality, we found we could create good sound quality with remote recording. It helps if the recordings take place in a small and somewhat cushioned room, such as a bedroom. There are online tools for remote recording, such as Sound trap and Anchor.fm. However, they are mostly not free and alarmingly often owned by Spotify, which raises concerns about privacy, intellectual property and data security.

We thus chose to keep it simple: We scheduled zoom meetings, and we asked our guests to record their end of the conversation with their smartphone's voice memo app. Modern smartphones have surprisingly good microphones (much better than most laptops). To avoid feedback echoes and keep audio tracks clean, we asked participants use headphones for their computer. Some colleagues also had proper voice recorders or professional microphones. We also recorded the Zoom-call (with separate voice tracks for each participant) as a back-up. This set-up resulted in good audio quality.

Lessons learned 2: Podcast need to be edited. This is a lot of work

Next, the recordings need to be edited. This means the voice tracks need to be combined into one file. Even for the smoothest conversation "ahs" and "ehms" need to be cut, as do background noises such as barking dogs or the loud noise of passing cars. In our case, conversations had to be shortened (academics are long-winded). Interviewees also could ask for retakes during the recording ("can I say this again?"), or for corrections or cuts afterwards. Finally, we needed to add our signature music at the beginning and end of each episode: a tune created specifically for our podcast by Tim Dowd.

For the first episodes, we relied on a professional editor to do this for us. However, for budget reasons we edited most episodes ourselves. For the editing, we used Adobe Audition, and then finished it by using the online service Auphonic to smoothen the audio quality. Adobe Audition is not terribly difficult to learn to use (plenty of YouTube tutorials available, see below) but can be expensive depending on your university's licensing agreement. As anyone with experience in audio or video can attest editing is very time-consuming. Using a professional editor might thus seem a more attractive option. However, not all audio editors are trained sociologists and editing the episodes ourselves gave us more control of the content and the general flow of the conversation. Most importantly, however, lengthy editing can be avoided with good preparation and especially a good script.

Figure 1. Artists that the podcast' listeners listen to.

Lessons learned 3. A good script makes producing easier and podcasts much better

The inherent difficulty of editing can be mitigated, or compounded, by the structure of the recorded conversation itself. This leads us to the importance of a detailed format, conversation management and strict formatting. This is the most important lesson.

We soon found out that it is not difficult to just record an hour (or more) of academic conversation. What is more difficult, is to record an hour of academic conversation that is *structured and easy to follow for an audience, and not too long*. As you are probably aware, academics are often longwinded, so putting them together in a free form conversation without bounds led to terribly long recordings. Students also noted that episodes over an hour may be too much – we now believe that 45 minutes is ideal.

Over the 13 weeks of the course, we developed a clearly structured script for every episode. This script includes questions and timestamps, and clearly marked transitions and signposts that made the conversation easier to record and to follow for participants and students. We shared our script ideally a couple of days before with our participants so they could prepare their answers. This is vital, especially as recording remotely makes it more difficult to signal through body language that a participant should wrap up an answer or talk more quickly.

We also developed a clear structure, with some fixed "ingredients" for each episode, to structure our conversations in three parts. In the introduction, guest introduce themselves and we ask them some surprise questions to make them more at ease and to get the atmosphere more conversational. We also ask a set question "what surprised you most in the readings"? We very briefly summarize the main

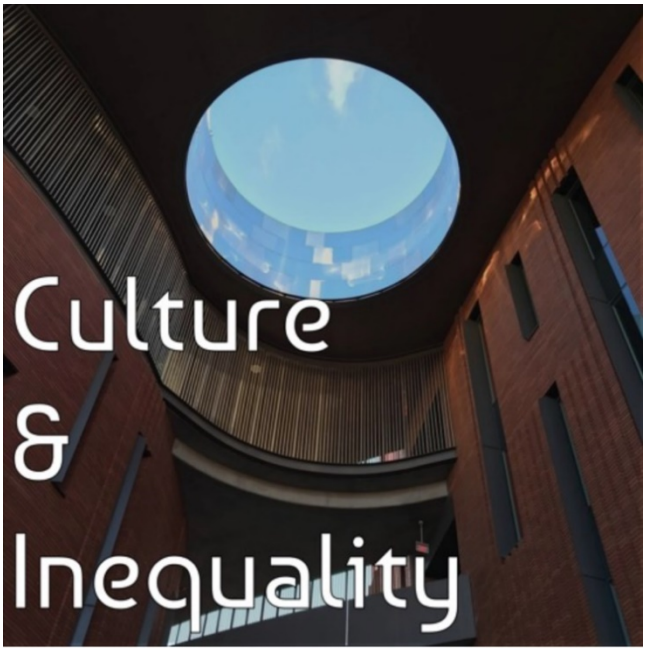

Figure 2. The podcast's covert art made by former ASA culture section chair Timothy Dowd.

arguments and readings of the day and explain why we picked this specific literature and how they relate to each other. The second part is (slightly) more free-form and in-depth: we are going through the different readings one by one, fleshing out the most important themes and arguments and connecting them with each other. More than simply rehashing the literature, guests also explain why and how conducted the research, often in colorful terms. This really helps to convey to students the dynamic nature of research, and the amount of time, work and contingencies involved in academic research. In the final part, we wrap up the conversation, look at avenues for further research and explain that week's assignments. While this structure generally worked, we are planning on making some improvements for the next series to make the transitions and signposting clearer to listeners. We will also use our "tune" more effectively to separate the sections.

During the conversation, it is important to remember that the audience mainly consists of interested students and others that are not as well

invested in the entire library of sociological literature as ourselves. This does not mean that we 'dumb down' the conversations, but it does require guests to explain some academic, social, political references. This also worked quite well because it led sometimes to rather vivid descriptions and mini analyses: for instance, when an American guest tried to convey the cultural significance of The Met to an imagined international audience. It also means that we sometimes slowdown the conversation a bit or ask clarifying questions that we would ordinarily not ask your colleague.

One important discovery that we made along the way: Combining guests that do not know each other made for the most stimulating conversations. It helped the flow of conversation and forced guests to explain their ideas again in clearer terms. With guests that have known each other for some time or know each other well, the conversations get more technical and more in-crowd more quickly, while people who don't know each other may strike up new conversations and will ask each other questions. For instance, the episode on culture and inequality "beyond the Euro-American cultural bubble" resulted in a a very lively exchange between Predrag Cvetičanin (University of Nis, Serbia), and Yang Gao (Furman U, but originally from China).

An important reason why the three-way conversations worked so well, however, is that these were typically much better prepared, not only by the hosts, but also by the guests. The main lesson we learned, thus, is that the informal, seemingly unstructured and "live" feel of a good podcast is the result of good preparation (especially by the host), careful scripting and gentle, but firm guidance of the conversation.

Quo vadis? (What's next?)

On the basis of our experience, we believe podcasts have a great potential for learning and scholarly communication. it is not only a great teaching tool. As we discussed in the closing episode (which features both authors of this piece and Dave O'Brien), the podcast fostered a sense of academic community in a time of pandemic isolation. We received enthusiastic responses from around the world from people telling us the podcast made them feel in touch with scholars around the world, keeping them updated with new ideas. Finally, podcasts allow us to share research insights more widely in a more accessible way. The standard form of dissemination of academic knowledge, the journal article, is a highly specialized form of expert communication. Although we all use it in teaching, it is not meant for that and students often struggle with the format. Even for advanced scholars, it is not the most stimulating form. Podcasts offers an attractive and relatively easy way to tell the world about our work, and our discipline, and to contribute to fostering and international academic community. Even in the "new normal", this international community will probably have to rely more on long-distance communication, and podcasts may serve as a "tie" to bind this community.

Useful links

The course

Website https://eucci.eu/podcast/
Podcast link: https://soundcloud.com/culture-inequality
European Center for the study of Culture and Inequality: www.eucci.eu

Editing software and tutorials

How to get your podcast on Apple Podcasts: https://help.podbean.com/support/solutions/article

s/25000004811-submitting-my-podcast-to-apple-podcasts-itunes-
How to get your podcast on Spotify: https://support.spotifyforpodcasters.com/hc/en-us/articles/360043487932-Getting-your-podcast-on-Spotify

How to make your own podcast in Adobe Audition: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSWMVmRoHHs
How to use Auphonic for podcasters: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcXcFhJQRZU

Podcast platforms
Apple Podcasts: podcasts.apple.com
Google podcasts: podcasts.google.com
Soundcloud: www.soundcloud.com
Spotify for Podcasters: http://podcasters.spotify.com

Other sociological podcasts:
Social Science Bites – Brief but enjoyable episodes hosted by SAGE www.socialsciencebites.com
New Books in Sociology Podcast – Interviews authors of newly published sociology books https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/new-books-in-sociology/id425683368
New Books in Critical Theory Podcast – hosted by one of our regular hosts from Culture and Inequality, dr. Dave O'Brien https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/new-books-in-critical-theory/id593872749
Annex Sociology Podcast from the Queens Podcast Lab https://queenspodcastlab.org/annex/
SAGE Sociology Podcasts - https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/sage-sociology/id871126157
The Sociological Review Podcasts: https://soundcloud.com/thesociologicalreview
Soziopod – German sociological podcast: https://soziopod.de

Announcement

New Articles

Altheide, David L. 2020. "Pandemic in the Time of Trump: Digital Media Logic and Deadly Politics." *Symbolic Interaction* 43(3):514-40. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/symb.501

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New Books

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Other

Culture Section Member Aneesh Aneesh was recently featured in a CNN feature on fixing the Y2K bug. You may view the feature here: https://www.cnn.com/videos/business/2020/12/10/fixing-the-bug-y2k.cnn