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# ACCOUNTS

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- 1 Message from the Chair
  - 2 On Identity Theft: An Interview with Jordan Brensinger
  - 5 On Predatory Actors in Opaque-Quality Markets: An Interview with Adam Goldstein
  - 8 On Teaching and Doing Sociology in Business Schools: An Interview with Laura Doering
  - 10 Section Office Holders
  - 11 Spotlight: An Interview with Brittany Bond
  - 14 Spotlight: An Interview with Zosia Cooper
  - 17 Public Sociology: An Interview with Algernon Austin
  - 19 Bookshelf: An Interview with Emily Hund on *The Influencer Industry*
  - 22 New Publications
  - 23 PhDs on the Market
  - 25 Editorial Committee
- 

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

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Dear Colleagues,

In September, when I asked for volunteers, the response was tremendous. Many of you were eager to join committees and organize community events. This enthusiasm ensures an engaging year ahead for our economic sociology section.

Recently, [Alya Guseva](#) and [Akos Rona-Tas](#) hosted an informative Meet-the-Editors event on Zoom. They not only introduced the journal but also offered valuable advice to emerging and new authors.

[Julia Dessauer](#), [Annie Murphy](#), [Jack Thornton](#), and [Zhen Wang](#) are developing a website. This site will introduce economic sociology to the curious and aid instructors in creating their first courses in this subfield. This effort to broaden our reach is crucial for maintaining the vitality and intellectual richness of our field. A big thank you to everyone who con-



tributed their syllabi. We're hopeful that economic sociology will find a wider audience, both within and beyond sociology departments.

[Carly Knight](#) is revitalizing our mentoring program. After surveying our members about their interest in participating, we plan to launch this program in early spring.

[Jeff Sheng](#) is organizing another Zoom event to celebrate our 2023 award winners. The award committee chairs will discuss their favorite books and articles, and we'll invite the authors to share their inspirations.

[Barbara Kiviat](#) and [John N. Robinson III](#) are putting together an online workshop focusing on professional development. We aim to help ad-

vanced graduate students, postdocs, and tenure-track faculty navigate a crucial yet often isolating stage of their careers.

[Gökhan Mülayim](#) and the Accounts editorial team have prepared another rich issue of the newsletter. It features interviews with scholars such as [Jordan Brensinger](#), [Laura Doering](#), [Adam Goldstein](#), [Brittany Bond](#), [Zosia Cooper](#), [Algernon Austin](#), and [Emily Hund](#).

All these planned events and ongoing efforts reflect the commitment and community spirit of our section. I am personally grateful to work with such dedicated scholars. We're excited to see you at these upcoming events.

Ken-Hou Lin ■

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## ON IDENTITY THEFT: AN INTERVIEW WITH JORDAN BRENSINGER

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Jordan Brensinger is a postdoctoral research associate at Princeton University's Center for Information Technology Policy. He received his PhD in sociology from Columbia University. His research interests are grounded in cultural sociological approaches to economic sociology; inequality; organizations; and science, knowledge, and technology. He focuses on how organizations leverage data to identify people and make decisions about them, while also examining the implications of the identification processes for individuals' daily lives, organizational policies and practice, and broader societal effects. He received the Best Graduate Student Paper Award from ASA's Political Sociology section, and his research work has been published in *American Sociological Review* and *Sociological Theory*.

Ya-Ching Huang, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Boston University, talked to Jordan Brensinger about his article, "Identify Theft, Trust Breaches, and the Production of Economic Insecurity," published this year in *American Sociological Review*.

**Ya-Ching Huang:** *Thank you for joining us for this interview. Could you please share the backstory of how your research on identity theft began?*

**Jordan Brensinger:** Back in 2017, I was in the process of trying to identify a dissertation topic, and found myself circling around data science and technology ethics. Then, in September that year, the credit bureau Equifax suffered a major data breach exposing sensitive data for nearly 150 million people in the United States. I immediately recognized the magnitude of the issue

from the perspective of a consumer who had interacted with Equifax and began reading media about what to do. I consistently encountered advice about taking steps like checking or freezing your credit—essentially, "look out for yourself." This mismatch between a systemic issue and an individual solution got me interested in data security and information systems as a subject for sociological investigation. Looking for a way to begin exploring the issue of identity theft empirically, I reached out to a prominent organization in the space, the Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC) in San Diego, CA, and asked if I could shadow their work during the

summer of 2018. My study owes much to the fact they enthusiastically agreed!

**Y.-C. H.:** *Your article discusses how trust breaches at interpersonal, organizational, and systemic levels impact identity theft victims' perceptions of insecurity and their behavioral responses. Could you elaborate on your key findings?*

**J. B.:** The article demonstrates that identity theft not only impacts individuals' material well-being—e.g., bank account balances, credit obligations, and access to public benefits—but also their sense of trust in actors or systems on which they feel their financial lives depend. Victims can come away suspicious of people around them who seem capable of committing that crime in the future. They can feel betrayed or let down by organizations, like banks, that they thought would have their backs. And they can even worry about how systems, like the Internet, may put their financial lives at risk. These are different forms of what I call trust breaches. Distinguishing between them enables us to see how social position shapes experiences of identity theft. I found that low-income people and people of color tended to become suspicious of other people in their networks, while middle- and upper-income people and white people tended to blame organizations. This shaped how they reported responding to identity theft. Those who focused on their networks often reported limiting exposure to people they considered “risky.” Those who focused on organizations advocated for greater organizational accountability.

**Y.-C. H.:** *Your research highlights the role of race and class in individuals' responses to the event of identity theft. How do your findings align with or challenge existing studies?*

**J. B.:** There is not much research on how race and class relate to identity theft, and what exists primarily speaks to differential exposure (i.e., low-income people and people of color tend to experience more severe forms of identity theft than more economically and racially privileged individuals). In contrast, my work contributes to



our understanding of how race and class relate to the ways people make sense of identity theft. In addition, most (though not all) literature on trust suggests that economic disadvantage and racial marginality contribute to mistrust. While low-income people and people of color tended to report interpersonal mistrust more than others in the study, middle- and upper-income and white people reported greater levels of organizational mistrust in response to identity theft. This underscores the importance of distinguishing between the three forms of individual trust. I think it also suggests an opportunity for future research exploring when and how people of privilege perceive organizations as failing them or letting them down (at least I am not aware of much work on that topic).

**Y.-C. H.:** *You propose a trust-based theory of insecurity to understand the experiences of identity theft victims. How does this theory contribute to economic sociology, and in what other contexts do you envision its application beyond identity theft?*

**J. B.:** My goal with the theory was to highlight the potential role of trust breaches in producing eco-

conomic insecurity. People's financial lives unavoidably depend on other people, organizations, and systems (though of course the nature and degree of this dependency varies considerably). So, any event—not just identity theft—that makes it difficult to anticipate how those actors or systems will act could leave people feeling financially insecure. A deep disagreement with a financial provider (e.g., parent or partner); news about localized or widespread layoffs; backlogged or malfunctioning online benefits systems (as happened during the pandemic)—these and many other events may leave people feeling vulnerable to financial hardship. I hope my theory will help economic sociologists better specify the mechanisms underlying known sources of insecurity and, by drawing attention to any event that breaches trust, point them to new sources as well.

**Y.-C. H.:** *You rely on a subset of detailed qualitative cases to present your findings and make theoretical arguments. What are some advantages or potential drawbacks of using this approach?*

**J. B.:** Articles based on qualitative cases face a tradeoff between breadth and depth; there is only so much room to quote interview transcripts or fieldnotes. When I wrote the article, I initially considered demonstrating the components of the theory using only short excerpts from a larger number of cases so that readers would see the theory's broad applicability in my study. But I recognized that such an approach came at the cost of providing deeper descriptions of the meaning-making processes, something afforded by a more selective approach. So, I ultimately opted for a (what I think may be somewhat novel) blended approach between these two poles. I began by introducing a set of four detailed cases, which I carried through the analysis, and then supplemented these with a number of other cases from the study to support the various components of the argument. This allowed me to provide more detailed accounts that illustrated the whole theory along with a broader base of supporting evidence. While well suited for theory development, such an approach does not allow

me to make claims about the empirical generalizability of my theory to broader populations. For that, I am separately exploring a number of national surveys. The other more practical limitation is that my approach to presenting my findings took up a lot of space—so I think it would be fairly difficult to pull off within the shorter word limits of most journals.

**Y.-C. H.:** *Your analysis also includes “negative cases” in which interviewees did not express insecurity or mistrust. How did you incorporate these cases to refine your theory?*

**J. B.:** Negative cases should lead us to ask: Why did things play out differently? In my case, when most people felt insecure following identity theft, why did some people sound completely unconcerned? While having only a few negative cases makes it difficult to pin all such factors down precisely, I intentionally looked at them as a set to try to identify any similarities compared to the rest of my cases. What I found was that a number of people in this group shared stories of positive past experiences dealing with fraud, which left them feeling (whether accurately or not) better able to anticipate what would happen in the present case. This “shadow of the past” appears to buffer individuals from a loss of trust—at least when things turn out well. I suspect if their cases had gone badly (i.e., with them losing money or having a very difficult time trying to clear up the issue), they may have revised their understanding.

**Y.-C. H.:** *What are you working on currently, and what is next for you research-wise?*

**J. B.:** I'm currently working on a number of articles from the larger project focusing on how people manage personal data and the production of accuracy, and also mapping out a book that brings many of these pieces together. Specifically, the book will link my account of insecurity to the sociotechnical systems that organizations use to identify people and situate them within the economic and legal environments of the data economy.

I am also in the early stages of thinking through a number of additional projects, most of which revolve around new digital technologies used to iden-

tify people and the associated efforts to develop comprehensive platform infrastructures around them. The pandemic accelerated the trend toward managing relationships virtually, such that businesses and government increasingly manage their workers, customers/clients/members/beneficiaries, and vendors through digital platforms. At the center of this, vendors of tools based on evolving forms of facial recognition and “device

fingerprinting” (the use of device metadata to differentiate between and track users) play an increasingly important role in whether or not and how people get and retain access to crucial resources. I’m interested in exploring how they go about constructing ostensibly unique “identities” for people, the discourses they use to justify their tools, and the impact those tools have on individual wellbeing and inequality. ■

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## ON PREDATORY ACTORS IN OPAQUE-QUALITY MARKETS: AN INTERVIEW WITH ADAM GOLDSTEIN

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Adam Goldstein is an Associate Professor jointly appointed in the Department of Sociology and the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs. He currently holds the Ralph O. Glendinning University Preceptorship. Prior to coming to Princeton he earned a PhD in Sociology from the University of California at Berkeley and was a Robert Wood Johnson Postdoctoral Scholar in Health Policy Research at Harvard. His areas of interest include economic sociology, organizations, and social stratification. His current research examines the social consequences of financial capitalism for institutions, households, organizations, and inequality in the United States.

Meghann Lucy, Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Boston University, talked to Dr. Adam Goldstein about his award-winning article “Asymmetry by Design? Identity Obfuscation, Reputational Pressure, and Consumer Predation in U.S. For-Profit Higher Education,” cowritten by Charlie Eaton, and his current projects.

**Meghann Lucy:** *Thank you for contributing to Accounts. What inspired you to look into the for-profit education industry? Did you begin the research project knowing that you wanted to understand the role of organizational structure in shaping an organization’s susceptibility to reputational penalties? Or was that something that developed later?*

**Adam Goldstein:** So, Charlie Eaton and I had previously collaborated on an article about financialization and higher education several years prior. Charlie had continued doing research on for-profit higher ed, and he was working on a larger book project about the topic at the time (*Bankers in the Ivory Tower*, which came out with

the University of Chicago Press in 2022). Anyway, we were talking sometime in 2018, and he was telling me about some interview data he had recently collected from former industry players, including a remarkable quote from one executive (which we include in the paper) about how maintaining multiple brand identities could help insulate the firm from the reputational consequences of furnishing low-value educational programs. I was like, “Wow, we should write a paper about robust action and consumer predation.”

So much organizational theory presumes that audiences value legible identities. But consumer audiences tend to focus on the outward facing brand identities, not the complex organizational structure behind them. So our thinking was that suppliers

might leverage that disconnect in ways that could help them sustain predatory behaviors in consumer markets, and this in turn might help explain persistently terrible outcomes in for-profit higher education.

I should say that in addition to multiple redundant identities, we were also initially interested in chameleon-type identity patterns, where a single-brand organization recurrently changes its outward facing identity over time. We did not observe as much of that in this particular case, but I suspect it represents a parallel form of robust action in some other markets where malfeasance behavior by suppliers is commonplace.

**M. L.:** *I'm curious about the origins of multiple organizational identities as a business strategy in higher education. I could imagine that organizations might develop multiple identities as a consequence of malfeasance accusations, that private investors might encourage the adoption of this strategy, that it occurs "naturally" after a series of acquisitions, or that it is related to mimetic organizational isomorphism. What is your sense of the origins?*

**A. G.:** It's a great question. We speculate about this a little bit in the paper. My best guess is that the answer is "all of the above". In some cases the strategy was clearly conscious and strategic. In other instances, I suspect that firms developed the multi-brand structure organically as a result of mergers, and then came to realize that maintaining the multiple brands (rather than consolidating) could be advantageous in terms of insulating them from reputational harm.

**M. L.:** *What role do you think government oversight should play in predatory industries in which product quality and organizational structures are opaque, leaving organizations largely unaffected by reputations for poor quality?*

**A. G.:** This is another great question. I think the short answer is that direct governmental regulation must play a massively greater role in such markets. The present case is quite instructive



here. During the final years of the Obama presidency there was a series of regulatory interventions, and many of the worst firms in our sample went out of business rather quickly. Their entire business model fell apart as soon as they faced even a modicum of consumer regulation enforcement.

Of course, there's a good case to be made *against* allowing for-profit suppliers to be in markets for social welfare goods with high levels of asymmetric information (like education and healthcare) altogether. One of the main recent currents in consumer regulatory intervention in these domains is focused on information transparency and publicly sponsored quality rating/scoring metrics (e.g., College Scorecard and CMS Hospital Quality Star Ratings). But it's unclear how much difference these informational "sunshine" initiatives make when it comes to empowering consumers in the face of misdirection by suppliers.

Another key point about opaque organizational structures is that private equity ownership operates as a legal technology of opacity. Because most private regulatory initiatives rely on voluntary report-

ing or repurpose existing publicly reported data, private firms' minimal public disclosure requirements make it an ideal ownership structure if the goal is to circumvent normative sanctions and public scrutiny. For instance, some of Charlie's other research on for-profit higher ed focuses specifically on the role of private equity ownership in spurring for-profit college predation. I am also currently working on a separate project with a graduate student (Marie-Lou Laprise) about private equity buyouts as a mechanism of accountability evasion in corporate decarbonization campaigns.

**M. L.:** *In what other types of industries might you see similar conditions and outcomes?*

**A. G.:** I mentioned healthcare above. That is the most direct parallel case insofar as product quality is extremely opaque, there are massive opportunities for suppliers to capture governmental subsidies even while supplying poor-quality services, and there has been a sharp trend toward ever greater commercialization and incursion of for-profit firms in a sector traditionally dominated by public, nonprofit, and small partnership models. This includes growing numbers of private equity (PE) acquisitions. I am currently working on a follow-up paper about exploitation of information asymmetry by PE-owned hospital providers. This builds on our "Asymmetry by Design?" paper and also partly on a provocative article that Cristobal Young and Xinxiang Chen published in *Social Forces* a few years ago about consumer assessments of healthcare quality.

**M. L.:** *It appears that "Asymmetry by Design?" may be part of a larger line of research into the U.S. higher education system in which you are engaged. Can you speak to this larger project and what you hope to learn from it?*

**A. G.:** I am one among several co-investigators within a sprawling series of grant-funded research projects, led by Laura Hamilton and Charlie Eaton. These projects explore various facets of higher education commercialization, financing, and student loan repayment policies.

We recently published an article for the *Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* on social stratification in uptake of federal student loan repayment plans, and we're currently conducting some research on the growth of graduate-level student loan debt. Laura is also leading an exciting series of papers with her students and postdocs about online-only degree programs as an emergent axis of shadow privatization and stratification within public and private nonprofit institutions.

One of the overarching themes that animates my interest in this area is the increasing individualization of risks in the provision of social welfare goods (and stratification therein). Individuals face growing demands to self-manage all sorts of high-stakes, complicated allocations within increasingly marketized social policy systems. Higher education and healthcare are prime sites to study these processes and their inequitable consequences.

**M. L.:** *Did you have a journal in mind while writing this article? How did journal choice influence the way you wrote and/or prepared the article for submission?*

**A. G.:** No, not at the outset. But as the research and the manuscript came together the *ASR* started to seem like a potentially plausible path. Also, this piece contained lots of moving parts (more than one reviewer suggested that it should be two articles). This inevitably means a longer manuscript. The *ASR* is one of the few print journals that is open to publishing longer pieces. ■

**ASA**

**119th Annual Meeting**

**August 9-13, 2024**

**Montreal, Canada**

**[FOR DETAILS](#)**

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# ON TEACHING AND DOING SOCIOLOGY IN BUSINESS SCHOOLS: AN INTERVIEW WITH LAURA DOERING

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Laura Doering is an Associate Professor of Strategic Management at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto and is cross-appointed in the Department of Sociology. As an economic sociologist, she examines how interactions and social psychological processes shape outcomes for households, organizations, and markets. Her research has been published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Sociological Science*, *Sociology of Development*, and *Journal of Business Venturing*. Professor Doering's research and writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *BBC News*, the *Globe and Mail*, *Salon*, and other outlets.

Zhen Wang, a Ph.D. student at the University of Toronto, spoke with Laura Doering about teaching and doing sociology in business schools.

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**Zhen Wang:** *Could you tell us the story of how you entered the field of economic sociology? What drew you into this subfield, and what kind of projects are you currently working on?*

**Laura Doering:** Believe it or not, I initially came to economic sociology out of spite. When I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago, we had to take preliminary exams in various topic areas. One of those areas was economic sociology. My cohort was numerically male-dominated, and at the outset none of the women were taking the economic sociology prelim. I found this troubling. Even though I didn't want to take the econ soc prelim and didn't know anything about the subfield, I signed up for the exam out of spite.

Lo and behold, it turned out that I loved economic sociology! When I started grad school, I was already interested in economic development, but I found it was lacking some conceptual tools that I needed. In economic sociology I found those tools. They helped me look at economic development—things like microfinance and micro savings programs—in new ways. For example, research in development studies, which was where I was situated before grad school, doesn't have a lot of theories of interpersonal relationships. But economic sociology has amazing theo-

retical tools for thinking through how personal relationships shape economic transactions. I started to see development in a whole new light when I thought about it in the way that Viviana Zelizer thinks about children's life insurance or Brian Uzzi thinks about banking.

In my newer work, I am moving away from looking exclusively at economic development programs (though I'm still doing that too). I'm interested in the way that interactions—these fleeting but repetitive and surprisingly powerful moments of exchange—can shape inequality in organizations and markets. I have [a new paper in \*Sociological Science\*](#) with Jan Doering and András Tilcsik where we look at how women experience “ambiguous incidents.” These are instances in which people think they may have been on the receiving end of gender discrimination, but they're not sure. We looked at women's emotional reactions to those experiences via interviews, then we ran a survey to get a sense of how common those experiences are, and finally we ran an experiment to look at how women anticipate responding to these events. Overall, the paper shows the way that gender discrimination is often shrouded in uncertainty and how differently people react when they are sure they were the targets of discrimination versus when they're not certain.

I'm also working on a book! Not surprisingly, it's about interactions. In it I develop the concept of



“touchpoints,” that is, repeating interactions that involve the distribution of valued resources, and show how they reduce or amplify inequalities in organizations and markets. It’s a way for me to bring together theoretical and empirical ideas that have been running through my published work, but that I haven’t brought together in a coherent way. This might sound crazy, but I really love working on this book! It’s so different from article writing, which is about precision above all else. Writing a book is so much more expansive and lyrical. It’s a fun challenge to compose and share ideas in a different way.

**Z. W.:** *In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between being a sociologist in a sociology department and in a business school, both in terms of research and teaching?*

**L. D.:** I have a front row seat to these differences because my husband is a professor in the sociology department at the University of Toronto, so we talk about this all the time! It’s very different, both in terms of research and teaching. The range of sociology journals that are valued in business schools is extremely narrow. A handful of business schools value *AJS* and *ASR* very highly. Beyond those sociology journals, there’s not a lot of recognition and most sociologists in business schools also publish in management journals (e.g., *Organization Science*, *ASQ*, *Management Science*). This is in part because business schools are interdisciplinary places. As a researcher, you’re going to be evaluated for tenure by folks from psychology, marketing, finance, and other areas. They are only going to be familiar with the “big name” journals. So your sociology publication outlets are much more constrained.

For graduate students who are thinking about this option, I would encourage them to look at the CVs of people with sociology PhDs who work in business schools and have been really successful in publishing. Check out people like Dan Wang at Columbia, Lauren Rivera at Northwestern, Amanda Sharkey at Arizona State, Sameer Srivastava at Berkeley, my colleague András Tilcsik at the University of Toronto.



For folks considering this option, I also think it’s worth noting that it’s common for assistant professors to be denied tenure at business schools. By comparison, this doesn’t happen very often in sociology departments. Before targeting business schools, you would want to make sure that your risk tolerance is high enough to account for that possible outcome.

In terms of teaching, the topics and students are different from what you would have in sociology. Of course, you’re teaching MBAs and undergraduate business students. Many people end up teaching courses like organizational behavior or strategy. I teach social entrepreneurship, strategic change, and a PhD course on economic sociology. It’s true that MBA students expect a more engaging and livelier classroom environment. To me, I find that challenge fun, but of course it’s not for everyone. I also find that MBA students are very interested in ideas from sociology, so I sprinkle them in liberally.

**Z. W.:** *What do you see as the biggest advantages and challenges of being a sociologist in a business school?*

**L. D.:** For me, the challenge has been the narrow range of publication outlets. Historically, I have not been very good at publishing in management journals, so it has at times been tough and stressful to focus all my energy on the top sociology journals. That can be exhausting! I love the breadth of journals that are valued in sociology departments, and sometimes I pine for that.

That said, I think there are two big advantages. The first one is fairly well known: You make more money. That makes life easier! The second is more substantive. Business schools are interdisciplinary places. I really enjoy knowing and talking with scholars who come from different fields. I like that the colleagues I go to seminars with don't share my theoretical preconceptions or methodological predispositions. I learn so much more that way! If I were always in dialogue exclusively with other sociologists, I think my perspectives would be more limited. Of

course, this isn't for everyone, but it's something I really value.

**Z. W.:** *What advice would you give early career scholars who might aspire to become sociology professors in departments outside of sociology?*

**L. D.:** Almost everyone in my grad school cohort ended up working outside sociology departments, so from my limited sample it seems like this is becoming more common. I can't speak too much to other programs, like policy schools or law schools, but for folks who are considering business schools, I would think seriously about the fact that this is a different career path compared with sociology. The tenure process will be different, the publication standards will be different, the teaching will be different. But different doesn't necessarily mean bad. Gather all the information that you can and make a realistic and informed choice about whether this is the kind of intellectual life that you would like to have. There are many roads to a good academic life. ■

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## SECTION OFFICE HOLDERS

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 Past Chair: Ashley Mears, Boston University  
 Section Secretary/Treasurer: Victoria Reyes, University of California, Riverside  
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 Armando Lara-Millan, University of California, Berkeley  
 Beth Redbird, Northwestern University  
 John Robinson, Princeton University  
 Katherine Sobering, University of North Texas  
 Devin Wiggs, Northwestern University (Student Representative)

### Virtual Talk

**"On the Interdependent Effects of Social Environment and Empathy on Trust"**

by Vincent Buskens, on March 12, 2024 - 8:00 a.m. (Arizona Time) | the Center for Trust Studies at the University of Arizona | Open to the Public | Prior Registration Required | [Link](#)

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## SPOTLIGHT: AN INTERVIEW WITH BRITTANY BOND

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Brittany Bond is an assistant professor of organizational behavior in the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. Dr. Bond, an organizational theorist and economic sociologist, delves into the significance of status recognition in labor market outcomes. Her research focuses on how personnel management systems, including talent recruitment and performance assessment, influence careers and affect firms' long-term performance. Her work has been published in journals like *Sociological Science*, highlighted on the US Census Bureau's Research Matters Blog, and featured on the Wharton Business Radio Show: *In the Workplace*. In 2020, Dr. Bond's dissertation, exploring the importance of symbolic status recognition within performance evaluation processes, garnered two prestigious awards: the Organization and Management Theory (OMT) Division's "Louis R. Pondy Best Dissertation Paper" and the "William H. Newman All-Academy Award for Best Paper Based on a Dissertation" at the Academy of Management. Prior to joining the Cornell ILR School, Dr. Bond earned her Ph.D. from the Economic Sociology Program at MIT Sloan in May 2020. Before her time at MIT, she served as an economist in the Office of the Chief Economist at the US Commerce Department, working on detail at the U.S. Census Bureau's Center for Economic Studies. There, she utilized internal Census hiring data and national longitudinal linked employer-household data (LEHD) for projects like optimizing the 2020 Decennial Census hiring operations. Brittany Bond received her MS in Public Policy and Management from the Heinz College at Carnegie Mellon University and her BA in International Economic Relations from American University in Washington, D.C.

Yasemin Girgin, a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Boston University, conducted an interview with Brittany Bond to discuss her research and experiences in sociology as a vocation.

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**Yasemin Girgin:** *Thank you for joining us in this issue. Could you tell us a bit about your story of becoming an economic sociologist? What prompted you to pursue a career in this field?*

**Brittany Bond:** Thank you for having me! I was fortunate enough that economic sociology found me. After getting a Master's in Public Policy and Management from the Heinz College of Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), I was working as a research economist for the Center of Economic Studies at the U.S. Census Bureau. There, I was using internal census hiring data in conjunction with national longitudinal linked employer-household data (LEHD) on projects, such as optimizing hiring operations for the 2020 Decennial Census collection. The senior economists I was working with all knew my desire to advance my research career by pursuing a PhD. So, they would ask me what questions I would

want to pursue during my studies. I didn't hold back. I gushed my enthusiasm to leverage massive datasets like the LEHD to connect evolving demographic patterns with economic outcomes in ways theorized by network sociology. Their response... was that I should explore some programs other than economics. Heeding their advice, I connected with David Krackhardt who had taught me Organizational Design and Implementation at CMU. When he heard what kind of questions I would love to study, he asked, "Have you heard of the Economic Sociology Program at MIT Sloan School of Management?"

**Y. G.:** *Could you share a little bit about your current research on how talent recruitment and performance assessments shape careers and influence the long-term performance of firms?*

**B. B.:** I'm finalizing, for publication, my dissertation work looking at how top performers respond

when denied recognition in the form of top performance review ratings. Using data generated from a case in which a large organization created a forced ranking system (that limited the possible number of top ratings available to designate top performers), I show that top performers who earn a top rating in management assessment but do not receive a top ranking in the firm's formal announcements because of the tight forced ranking are much more likely to leave. In this setting, managers give those who earned top ratings but were denied top rankings larger bonuses than the top-ranking recipients. They do this as a way to try and compensate the downgraded employees for their denied recognition. Such features allow me to rule out typical confounds that get in the way of showing how restrictions on recognition can backfire. This helps demonstrate that restricting recognition, typically with the intention of making such recognition more valuable and therefore more motivating, comes with consequences. What has been fascinating is that these ratings are private and that denied top performers are given valid assurances that being denied an earned top ranking due to the enforcement of the preset ranking distribution is inconsequential.

This story is more nuanced than what we are now learning about the mechanisms behind unintended consequences of nonmonetary reward schemes. There's not a ton that social comparison theory can explain when ratings are private. Not only is it doubtful that reputation costs are driving the behavior, but, in this case, being denied a ranking actually makes you materially better off. This research opens up a broader net of possible explanatory theories, which, as elaborated below, I plan on continuing to pursue and develop. In the meantime, the current investigations can help organizations avoid costly consequences when trying to use restricted recognition schemes to motivate high performance.

**Y. G.:** *You teach several classes on power. In what novel ways do you think economic sociologists could leverage the concept of power to analyze social problems in different organizational settings?*



**B. B.:** When teaching classes on power and influence to undergraduate and masters students, it is a challenge to find a sufficient variety of macro studies of power that engage student interest as much as cases revolving around individuals and interpersonal relationships. Being at the Industrial and Labor Relations School at Cornell, I do get plenty of leverage from collective action cases and examples of worker voice. However, I think there's a lot of opportunity to study shifting power differentials in other contexts and settings that would also engage students.

I think economic sociologists are uniquely positioned to unpack puzzling phenomenon across a web of asymmetric power relationships and exchanges in networks of different types of organizational actors. Some cool research on the horizon includes dissertation work (by Eppa Rixey at MIT) looking at how craft beer trade associations in certain states were more successful in changing the regulations necessary to sell direct to consumers through specific crossindustry alliances and against

vested and entrenched interests. These kinds of studies show all the potential there is to develop further insight into how different kinds of organizations can come together in competitive environments to form new regimes. I am excited to see more studies with insights that advance our understanding of power dynamics, especially with capacity to address macro social problems with diverse organizational configurations.

**Y. G.:** *How do you design your courses? Are there any particular topics or readings that strike the interest of students and stimulate thought-provoking discussions?*

**B. B.:** No matter the subject matter or level, I always make sure my courses entail a mix of learning modalities. From cases to expert guest lecturers, from in-class debates to small data analyses and critical interpretations in writing assignments, I find having a variety of learning approaches makes every class more energetic. And it helps keep me on my toes.

Students seem to report back that the topics that were most impactful are those that have a surprising dimension to them. For instance, students love exploring how “jerks,” normally off-putting, tend to gain acceptance when they are “our jerk,” bringing in outsized grabs for the greater group, and the implications this has for navigating jerks and “groupiness” (group identifications/identities) within organizations. Similarly, toward the end of the semester we explore how some of the same methods that helped certain historical figures ascend to top leadership roles also led to their ouster.

In my PhD seminar on Macro Organizational Behavior, I encourage students to engage the core readings by generating and researching questions of interest to them. So, at the start of the semester, for example, a student may be writing memos on how Weber’s notions of authority relate to her master’s paper on antecedents for effective relations among boards of directors and CEOs. At the end of the semester, students will be using recent publications in their research topic area to converse with and build upon canoni-

cal texts in ways that can advance their own contributions. The energy in the seminar builds over the course of the semester as students see their individual projects make progress during our time together, engaging with core theoretical lenses and turning their research questions over and over in each new light.

**Y. G.:** *What suggestions and tips would you give doctoral students on the job market, or at earlier stages of their career?*

**B. B.:** I must echo the constant refrain to make sure you are working on something you really care about, something that fascinates you, and are doing so in a method you love. In my case, I started collecting the data for my job market paper in 2016. As of this writing, I’m still working on the topic. Thankfully, the issues still excite me, especially whenever I’m working on a new aspect of it or getting to look at it from a new angle. A day of working deeply, experiencing that elusive “flow,” on some new data or approach help make all the months of journal angst worth it.

Also, I think it helps to make peace with an alternative vision where you might not secure a perfect—or even what you originally thought would be a desirable—outcome on the job market. I knew I wanted to be an academic four years before ever starting my PhD. But when my job market time came, I made peace with whatever outcome lay ahead once I convinced myself that no matter what, I would find somewhere to publish the three chapters of my dissertation (even if just on some online repository). With that, I could go into all the situations that lay ahead trusting that the most important thing for me would somehow happen. That’s freeing in a sort of nothing-to-lose kind of way. Happily, it all turned out well, but the confidence and energy to move through a challenging competitive process was valuable.

**Y. G.:** *What is on the horizon? Could you tell us about your future research plans?*

**B. B.:** Three new projects define my horizon. One direction builds on my dissertation work mentioned above. The data I used for my job market paper

does not allow me to satisfactorily disentangle several possible mechanisms behind why top performers leave when denied recognition despite material remuneration and other substantial compensation within the forced-ranking process. Therefore, I'm working to set something up that will allow me to better test the mechanisms, as well as boundary conditions, behind the starkest negative consequences of forced-ranking recognition schemes.

A second avenue, with colleague Mabel Abraham, advances my current work on evaluations by looking at the effects of transparency in peer feedback that serve as input into performance ratings. Input from as many stakeholders as possible is one way managers and organizations seek to increase meritocracy in evaluations. When it comes to the degree of transparency in the inputs, however, it is still an open question: Is it more *useful* when feedback is generated without

the specific identity of the feedback giver known to the recipient or when it is known? Moreover, do the demographics of the feedback giver matter in terms of how givers update their feedback content depending on whether their identity will be known by the recipient or not? All these considerations are important when weighing potential trade-offs in the design of evaluation platforms.

Finally, I'm embarking on a new approach to my study of recognition within organizations through a collaborative effort aimed at reducing burnout among veterinarians. Those pursuing a career in veterinary medicine are often driven by strong passions; yet the profession experiences a high burnout rate, and especially so since COVID. We are specifically interested in seeing how individual veterinarians respond to new adaptations of more traditional organizational burnout reduction practices. Hopefully, we're able to make some tangible improvement. ■

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## SPOTLIGHT: AN INTERVIEW WITH ZOSIA COOPER

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Zosia Cooper is a doctoral student in Sociology at UC San Diego who studies how people think about work and the economy. She is particularly interested in understanding how ideas from economics operate culturally, as guiding frameworks for action. Although much of the subject matter she works on fits under the umbrella of economic sociology, she often uses theoretical tools from the study of organizations. Before starting her Ph.D., Zosia had a varied career working in an agency of the federal government and then two nonprofit organizations focusing on financial transparency and gender-based violence, respectively. Her journey through the nonacademic workforce—as well as the knowledge and experience she picked up along the way—informs her academic work today.

Dr. Gökhan Mülayim interviewed Zosia Cooper about her research and experiences in sociology as a vocation.

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**Gökhan Mülayim:** *Thank you for joining us for this issue. Let me begin with your collaborative research on libertarianism in academia, conducted with Drs. Amy Binder and Jeffrey Kidder. Could you share the story behind this research and what inspired you?*

**Zosia Cooper:** It's really inspired by what Jeff and Amy saw out in the field while doing re-

search for their book, *The Channels of Student Activism*. (I pitched in as well toward the end of the project.) They were looking at politically active undergraduates of every ideological persuasion, and meeting some libertarians who couldn't really be categorized as either "left" or "right" on the ideological spectrum. Through these students, we also learned about some curious organizations that provide a lot of support to libertarian-friendly academics, but aren't necessarily affiliated with a uni-

versity and seemed to have a slight political bent to them.

In other words, there were several good intellectual reasons to study libertarians: First, because libertarians have rarely been studied *as such* (they usually get lumped in with conservatives). Second, it provides an opportunity to understand more about the relationship between politics and academia. Given how troubled the media and certain politicians are about this relationship, we felt there was no time like the present to dig into it.

As the only economic sociologist in the bunch with a preexisting interest in cultural aspects of the economy, I was also really interested in libertarianism as the ethical argument for free markets. I think that interest is reflected in the paper I'm lead authoring from our data, which asks how a libertarian intellectual niche has sustained itself, even as its influence over politics and popular culture has receded somewhat.

**G. M.:** *What surprised you most within the realm of libertarian politics in academia?*

**Z. C.:** This is probably going to be controversial, but the biggest surprise was that Charles Koch's academic philanthropy is not as poisonous as it's sometimes made out to be.

For the readers who are not familiar with the uproar over Koch's academic philanthropy, much of the critique alleges that Koch is essentially buying research or teaching that supports his political agenda. And Koch's political agenda is highly problematic: Koch's political philanthropy (which is substantially larger than the academic side) has been linked to a "rightward lunge" in Republican party politics and to enabling greater access to policymakers for corporate actors.

But the academic field operates on an entirely different set of rules and logics than the political field does, and Koch knows that. Based on our data, it's unlikely that receiving Koch funding has motivated any academic to make research conclusions they wouldn't already make; rather, people who are al-



ready libertarian-friendly pre-Koch funding are more likely to receive that funding.

Another set of critiques argues that the Koch Foundation is involved in faculty hiring decisions in a way that imperils academic freedom. In our interview with the foundation's executive director, he conceded that early grant agreements had strings attached, although he argues that these strings were standard for academic grants at the time. But after the uproar that ensued, the foundation adjusted its practices, and our data suggests that it is now an extraordinarily hands-off funder that seems to really put its faith in the academics it identifies.

Now, you could still argue that Koch is helping to keep libertarian ideas alive in the academy beyond their natural life span and that this is a taint on academic freedom. But the same could be said for any politically oriented funder, of which there are many. As long as higher ed relies on private funding, academic freedom is always going to be compromised in this way.

**G. M.:** *I am intrigued about the methodology of your work. Could you tell us the challenges you encountered during this research?*

**Z. C.:** Much of our data comes from interviews with libertarian-leaning faculty and grad students and the leaders of libertarian organizations who work in the higher ed space. We were lucky to have a very high response rate to our interview requests, but some of the academics we spoke to were afraid of getting blowback for their views. As a result some were not willing to go on the record with us. Though we remain so grateful for their time, organization leaders sometimes gave us smart, interesting answers that nevertheless could feel “safe”—as you might expect from media-trained figureheads. There may have been one or two testy exchanges that ensued as we poked and prodded to get underneath the talking points.

Luckily, because of the media and academic interest in libertarian thought and Koch, there is a lot of material that we could use to triangulate the information we were getting from participants. But even that is surrounded by intrigue, because Koch political organizations are so secretive (in contrast to the academic philanthropy, which was one of the first to publish grant agreements online). Investigative journalists have done a lot with secret recordings at meetings, attendee lists that were thrown in the trash, and so on, but it is very hard to feel sure that you’re getting the whole picture.

**G. M.:** *In your primary research project, you delve into Gen Z’s financial investment behaviors, exploring what motivates young individuals with limited assets to risk them in financial markets. Could you share more details about this project?*

**Z. C.:** Absolutely, I’m so excited about this project. The puzzle is not just that Gen Zs are investing in financial markets, but *how* they are investing. Unlike previous generations, who may have become investors by default after their employers opened retirement accounts for them, Gen Zs are *choosing* to be engaged in financial

markets. The most recent surveys say that 56% of 18–25 year olds own financial assets outside of retirement accounts. On top of this, Gen Zs are also more likely than their older counterparts to invest in cryptocurrencies and NFTs, and to actively trade individual stocks or risky assets like options. Some Gen Zs seem to live and breathe this stuff: A survey found that 48% of Gen Z investors check their portfolio several times a day.

To be clear, these strategies are considered not just riskier but also less profitable overall than just parking your money in an index fund. Behavioral economists would explain this by saying that Gen Zs are “overconfident” in their abilities as investors, but I think there is an opportunity here to examine the social underpinnings of this overconfidence and understand what makes these investment strategies seem like a good idea. To get at that, I am interviewing Gen Z investors and asking how investment fits in with their efforts to build careers and lives for themselves. Their economic power is only going to grow, so I’m hoping that insights into how and why Gen Zs invest can help us anticipate future economic fluctuation.

**G. M.:** *In addition to research, you have also engaged in data activism. I am curious about your experiences and perspectives on being at the intersections of academia and activism.*

**Z. C.:** Yes! For several years, I worked in an organization that works with governments around the world to publish data about who owns companies in their jurisdictions. The idea was to help reverse the “race to the bottom” in corporate regulation and help tax authorities track down funds squirreled away in secrecy jurisdictions. I was more of an advocate than an activist, as I worked fairly closely with government officials and other stakeholders to get reforms through.

I don’t think it will surprise any of my former colleagues that I was always a researcher at heart, though. There were so many intellectually fascinating aspects of this work: first of all, the notion of governments competing for investment as though they are businesses is a great case of economic ideas becoming guiding frameworks for action, even when there are other (better) options. But also,



advocates need a strong sociological imagination to understand the constraints and incentives that surround government decision makers. Where advocacy differs from academia is that it also tries to find ways around those constraints.

I am far too early in my academic career to claim any expertise on how to successfully manage these differences. But my feeling is that many early career sociologists like me hope to do research that is both intellectually rigorous and applicable to thorny social problems; that may even be why we got into this field over others. The good news is that more seasoned scholars have already thought about this issue: Monica Prasad's 2018 essay in *Contemporary Sociology* comes to mind; there was also a great presidential panel at the most recent ASA annual conference about economic sociology's potential to contribute to social policy. I would love to see more of this!

**G. M.:** *What lies ahead? Could you share some insight into your future research plans?*

**Z. C.:** We just submitted our first paper from the libertarians project. Led by Jeff, it looks at how libertarian scholars manage the stigma of being associated with actors like Charles Koch. In addition to my paper on the role of outside organizations in sustaining the libertarian niche in academia, we will have at least two more coming out of this data: one on a curricular form that is popular among libertarians (led by Amy), and another on how libertarian scholars draw boundaries between themselves.

And with any luck, I'll share some findings from my dissertation research—mostly analysis of survey data and early interviews—at this year's ASA conference. ■

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## PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY: AN INTERVIEW WITH ALGERNON AUSTIN

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Algernon Austin is the Director for Race and Economic Justice at the Center for Economic and Policy Research. He has conducted research and writing on issues of race and racial inequality for over 20 years. His primary focus has been on the intersection of race and the economy. Dr. Austin was the first Director of the Economic Policy Institute's Program on Race, Ethnicity, and the Economy where he focused on the labor market conditions of America's workers of color. He has also done work on racial wealth inequality for the Center for Global Policy Solutions and for the Dēmos think tank. At the Thurgood Marshall Institute, the think tank of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., he worked on issues related to race, the economy, and civil rights. Dr. Austin has a Ph.D. in sociology from Northwestern University, and he taught sociology as a faculty member at Wesleyan University. He has discussed racial inequality on PBS, CNN, NPR, and other national television and radio networks. His most recent book is *America Is Not Post-Racial: Xenophobia, Islamophobia, Racism, and the 44th President*.

Erika Brown, a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Texas Women's University, interviewed Algernon Austin about race, economic sociology, and public sociology.

**Erika Brown:** *Can you please give us insight into your current position at the Center for Economic and Policy Research and what your work aims to do?*

**Algernon Austin:** I am the Director for Race and Economic Justice at the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR). CEPR is what is

called a “think tank.” We do research and analysis on current economic policy issues affecting the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean. I work on the domestic, U.S. policy side of CEPR.

CEPR is a left-leaning organization. We see growing economic inequality in the United States as a major problem, and we understand the source of

the problem as stemming from the disproportionate power of the owners of capital over workers. Within this broad framework, I highlight the particular challenges for people of color. This includes the racial prejudice and discrimination that exists in addition to class inequality.

**E. B.:** *You are a sociologist in your training, but most of your career has been researching and studying the intersection of race and economy in think tanks, and not the academy. Given your sociological foundation, can you describe how your work uses that foundation and builds on it in a way that places it within the tradition of applied sociology and public scholarship?*

**A. A.:** The economic policy space is dominated by economists for the explanations of the economy and for policy recommendations and evaluations. But, frankly, most orthodox (as opposed to heterodox) economists have a flawed understanding of important aspects of economic life. For example, orthodox economists are not able to take racial discrimination seriously. The assumptions of rational, utility-maximizing actors and competitive markets lead them to deductively conclude that racial discrimination does not exist, or, if it does exist, it is quickly fading. They may say it existed in the past or that it only exists among inefficient firms and efficient firms will soon drive the discriminatory firms out of business. Thus, if we see durable inequalities by race today, orthodox economists deduce that it is because the subordinate groups have lower productivity, meaning they are lower quality workers, not because of racial discrimination.

This conclusion is incorrect, of course. There is an abundance of sociological research, not to mention news reports and hate crime statistics, indicating that racial prejudice and discrimination still do exist and are not rapidly fading away. I'm not the only one to highlight this flaw in orthodox economics. The late economist William Spriggs made this point in [an anguished letter](#) after the murder of George Floyd. The heterodox field of [stratification economics](#) was created to address this problem. Stratification economics, notably,



draws on the work of the sociologist Herbert Blumer and the social psychologist Thomas F. Pettigrew among other noneconomists. The economists in that heterodox subfield wisely look to other social science fields to help them understand racial and other forms of stratification.

As a sociologist, and one who has studied racial relations, I am not burdened with these flawed assumptions that make orthodox economists struggle with the issue of racial discrimination. I bring my sociological understanding of race into my discussion of racial economic inequality. Unlike some others, I also understand how racial ideology works within U.S. class dynamics. I recognize that elites stir up racial animosities to distract the public from the increasing concentration of wealth and power among a very small economic elite. It is important that there are voices challenging flawed orthodox economic thinking in our public policy discussions. So, there is a need for economic sociologists to be more engaged in policy debates.

**E. B.:** *It can be said that economic sociology has room to better understand the economic positionality of Black Americans. Can you please share some insights into your latest work to help us begin to better understand that positionality?*

**A. A.:** I have started to do work addressing the poor economic outcomes of Black males. To understand why the prime-age employment-to-population ratio for Black men is lower than men of all the other major racial groups or why there are more Black women working than Black men requires an approach that goes beyond the orthodox economic approach. For me to understand the problems and challenges facing Black men requires bringing in the sociology of racial relations, demography, the sociology of gender, and criminology. An approach that assumes purely individual rational actors would lead one very astray.

**E. B.:** *Often when reading your work, I am reminded of the work of one of U.S. sociology's founding fathers, W. E. B. Du Bois. Do you think that your work in academia and the public sphere call upon Du Bois' legacy in sociology in general and in economic sociology specifically? If so, how does it shape the way that you conduct your research?*

**A. A.:** I wouldn't put myself in the same league as Du Bois, but there is a similarity in how we conduct our sociology. Du Bois was very much concerned about changing the world that he lived in by finding solutions to racial inequality. In that sense, he was a public sociologist. My work in the public policy space is similarly concerned with finding solutions that can be applied today to improve the lives of Black people and ultimately the entire country. I try to remind people that the better off Black people are, the better off the United States is. If there are more Black people working, for example, there are more Americans working, and we have a stronger economy. ■

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## BOOKSHELF: AN INTERVIEW WITH EMILY HUND ON THE INFLUENCER INDUSTRY

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Emily Hund, PhD, is the author of the book, *The Influencer Industry: The Quest for Authenticity on Social Media* (Princeton University Press 2023), and a research affiliate at the Center on Digital Culture and Society at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. She writes, speaks, and consults on topics related to social media, consumer culture, and technology and creative industries. Before her research career, she worked as a magazine writer and social media editor.

Michelle Rabaut, Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the University of Michigan, interviewed Emily Hund about her new book *The Influencer Industry*.

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**Michelle Rabaut:** *Thank you for joining us in this issue. Can you please tell us a little bit about the backstory of your new book *The Influencer Industry*? How did you become interested in influencers and what sparked you to begin tracing the emergence of this multibillion dollar industry?*

**Emily Hund:** Thanks for having me! I became interested in influencers before "influencer" was a word we were using. I started my career working

in media, bouncing around different editorial positions in the late 2000s and early 2010s. I saw how the companies I worked for were confronting (or failing to confront) the rise of social media. Between the economic crisis and this burst of new communication technologies, print editors were desperate to figure out how to survive. Some chose to embrace the bloggers of the time who had cultivated huge audiences. Bloggers who were dubbed "influential" were able to circumvent the traditional systems for coming up in the industry and for

finding audiences for their writing, photography, styling, etc. I started to wonder how this rewriting of the rules was going to change what got published. How were bloggers going to change our information and cultural environment? That was the question that inspired me to go to graduate school and start the research that would become my doctoral dissertation and then expand to become the book. The book very much feels like a decade-plus-long journey that changed and expanded over time.

**M. R.:** *You write that the influencer industry is “both a symptom of and a response to the economic precarity and upheaval in social institutions that have characterized the early twenty-first century.” Can you tell us a bit more about this duality?*

**E. H.:** The influencer industry would not have developed in the way that it has if not for the economic crises and breakdown of social trust that we have experienced in recent decades. This was far and away the clearest finding from my research; nearly everyone I spoke to pointed to the Great Recession as the moment that redirected their careers and completely changed their thinking about what was possible for them. But the recession was in many ways the last straw. In the United States—and it’s worth noting that my book does focus on the U.S. context—there had been many other moments of upheaval that had challenged people’s sense of the world before this point. Trust in institutions, like religion, media, and government, was on the decline. Then we have a recession that just rocked people’s worlds in a much more immediate and tangible way. Lost jobs, lost income, lost savings, lost prospects—loss of a sense of trust in our systems. At this same moment in time, we had tons of optimism around new social media platforms. People flocked to blogging, tumblr, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook to express that they were still here. They still have expertise, they still have interests, they want to be seen, heard, and hired. Even after the recession was technically over, though, jobs did not recover in the way they had after previous recessions. Economic precarity persisted and still persists today. Social trust has not rebounded; it



has gotten worse. Against this backdrop, the influencer industry has expanded into a \$15-20 billion industry that is entirely dependent on the belief that its creators are more authentic and real than other sources of information and entertainment. This industry has not just rewritten the rules of professional media production, but the way we live our daily lives. Its birth was a response to an acute moment of economic and social upheaval; its flourishing indicates the underlying causes haven’t changed much.

**M. R.:** *Your past work has examined the feminization of digital creative work through your concept of “entrepreneurial femininity.” How does your book build upon these previous findings to further discuss the gendered dynamics of influencer labor and the industrialization of authenticity?*

**E. H.:** The influencer industry was largely built by women. “Mommy” bloggers, fashion bloggers, and other creators from traditionally feminine domains were the first social media influencers. Further,

many unseen influencer marketing professionals—the team leaders at brands and marketing agencies and the talent managers—were and are women.

In our 2015 study of fashion bloggers, Brooke Duffy and I wrote about this concept of entrepreneurial femininity: the way that the bloggers we studied portrayed themselves as autonomous and independent entrepreneurs while obscuring the amount of work that they do and the discipline that it requires and also while adhering to a very specific archetype—young, thin, heterosexual, almost always white, and feminine in stereotypical ways.

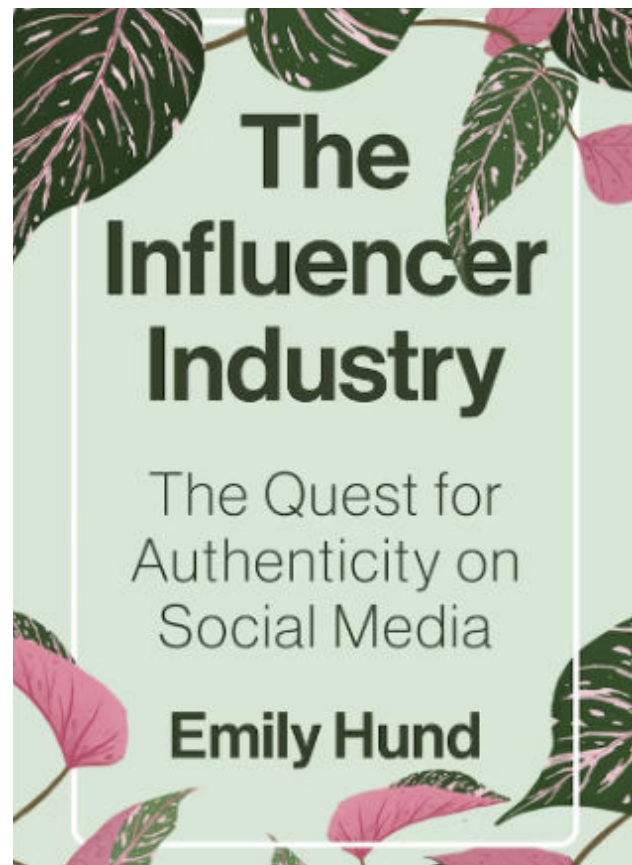
So there's this interesting paradox. The industry was largely built by women, but for many years most of the women at the forefront seemed to be perpetuating, and monetizing, tropes about femininity. I wanted to historicize and contextualize this in the book. A lot of these women, particularly mothers, felt shut out from other career paths and turned to blogging or Instagram because they felt it was their best option for some sort of professional fulfillment and income. I always remember one early interviewee who said this was the only way she could be “a full-time worker and a full-time mom.” The optimistic side of me sees this as an important story about women's resilience, intelligence, and scrappiness. At the same time, the industry often did little to challenge existing inequalities. Further, I believe the industry wasn't taken seriously by broader society for many years because it was seen as the domain of women. And that allowed harmful narratives to perpetuate within it and also for the infrastructure of the industry to expand without much notice.

What the industry has done over this time is industrialize authenticity itself. In order to succeed, influencers must perform their selfhoods—their realness—in ways that are shaped by the commercial needs of this complicated industry that is at once plagued by inequalities, conflicting incentives, and boundless potential.

**M. R.:** *While the influencer industry is always transforming and being renegotiated by a complex web of actors and political,*

*social, and economic forces, you name 2020 as a specific turning point. What concerns and potential futures do you see for this industry as we approach 2024? What advice do you have for scholars examining the influencer industry as a site of cultural and economic production?*

**E. H.:** 2020 was another moment of acute social upheaval. It wasn't the same as the recession era of 2007–2009, but it was reminiscent of it. There's intense, pervasive uncertainty. There's optimism about new platforms, in this case TikTok. The industry is able to expand rapidly by offering *more*: more opportunities to connect with supposedly authentic content and creators. Further blurring of the boundaries between who is and is not a creator. There is expansion into noncommercial spaces, as we see in an increase in overtly ideological messaging (such as from political campaigns or other groups) and a rise in influencers who are trying to teach their followers something—how to interpret current events or provide health or par-



enting advice and things like that. I wrote in the book that it is undergoing a shift from an industry centered on what to buy to one concerned with what to think.

The continued expansion of the industry means there is a never ending supply of research ideas. My advice for scholars of this industry is to remember that everything is connected. Every phe-

nomenon you encounter builds upon what has come before and is also related to other things going on at the moment. And it is not just a product of social media history, but of social history.

It is an exciting time to work in this area. These topics are not just important but immediately consequential. Don't rush the work, but honor that as best you can. ■

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## PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

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## PHDS ON THE MARKET



**Alan Zhang** | [alanz@mit.edu](mailto:alanz@mit.edu): I am in Work and Organization Studies at MIT Sloan. My research advances organizational and sociological theories of work and technology in the digital era. I study the organization and coordination of work in productions that are changing unpredictably. Specifically, I focus on productions where such supply-side instabilities are leveraged as a way of generating strategic value, rather than suppressed or mitigated. Using primarily qualitative methodologies (e.g., ethnographic observations, interviews, archival analyses), I immerse myself in field settings that span organizational boundaries in order to understand the cross-cutting interactions and contributions shaping production.



**Alana Haynes Stein** | [alstein@ucdavis.edu](mailto:alstein@ucdavis.edu): I'm a Ph.D. Candidate in Sociology at the University of California, Davis. My research uses theories of political economy, environmental justice, stratification, and organizations to study inequalities in the food system. My dissertation explores the implications of relying on food banks to end hunger despite their roots as organizations focused on food waste. I use mixed methods of in-depth interviews, content analysis, and geospatial analysis to study food banks in the U.S. I find a misalignment between the practices of food banks and the expectation that food banks can end hunger. Food banks are pressured by government and donors to provide individualized solutions to poverty, perpetuate inequities found in the public social safety net, avoid politically charged issues, and maintain the status quo of the industrial food system. However, I also identify a growing minority of food banks focusing on creating food and social justice.



**Faith Deckard** | [fdeckard@utexas.edu](mailto:fdeckard@utexas.edu): Faith M. Deckard is a sociology Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Texas at Austin. Her interest lies in understanding how marginalized groups experience, navigate, and respond to social control institutions. Her dissertation examines how families become entangled in carceral surveillance and punishment through bail (legal debt) and bail bonds (financial process). Through this work, she emphasizes the compatibility between carcerality and finance, and shows how they combine and filter down from state and financial institutions into the everyday life of families. Faith is a NSF, MFP, and NICHD fellow, and her research has been supported by the Russell Sage Foundation, the American Society of Criminology, and the American Association of University Women. Her approach to research and teaching is rooted in the conviction that our lived experience(s) can be a vehicle for producing, or touchstone for understanding, systematic knowledge and converting it into practice.



**Mira Vale** [miravale@umich.edu](mailto:miravale@umich.edu): My research spans economic sociology, medical sociology, and science and technology studies. I am interested in technological innovation and the transformation of expertise, values, and inequality. My dissertation examines the digital health industry, which adapts digital technology for healthcare and research. Despite concerns about privacy, the marketization of personal data, and algorithmic bias, digital data remains largely unregulated. My dissertation draws on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews to explore how digital health researchers tackle ethical questions in the absence of clear social or legal prescriptions. Amidst calls for an “ethics of AI,” my dissertation offers an empirical investigation into how powerful social actors are building the moral infrastructure for digital technology markets in healthcare and beyond. My work is published in *Social Science & Medicine*, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*; among other venues, and has received awards from multiple sections of the American Sociological Association.



**Taylor Laemmler** [laemmler@wisc.edu](mailto:laemmler@wisc.edu): I am a cultural sociologist who studies people’s experiences of class and inequality, focusing on how people make sense of their own social positions relative to other people and social groups and how those processes of sense-making can be implicated in the reproduction of inequality. I am especially interested in how these dynamics play out in the workplace, but my research explores a variety of social contexts. My work is wide-ranging in its approach, but it is frequently in conversation with thinking in the Bourdieuan and Goffmanian traditions. My research agenda is united by a focus on class and culture and a drive to understand how people become involved in their own and others’ subordination.

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Dr. [Gökhan Mülayim](#) received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Boston University. Working at the intersection of economic and cultural sociology; organizations, occupations, and work; and urban studies, he studies how the so-called extra-economic is being translated into the economic. He looks specifically into how peculiar goods and services are being economized, and how the markets for those goods and services are being constructed. Using ethnographic research tools, his dissertation examines the economization of security as a political, social, and affective good and service in the market for private security in Istanbul. He received his B.A. with honors in political science and international relations, and his M.A. in sociology from Boğazici University in Istanbul, Turkey.



[Meghann Lucy](#) is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Boston University. Her interests are in inequality, consumption, economic sociology, cultural sociology, and medical sociology. A recent project examines the roles of overconsumption and divestment in discourses of the self, class, and gender through a case study of “Tidying Up with Marie Kondo.” Other research investigates the medicalization of overaccumulation, that is, of hoarding disorder. In this work she evaluates the extent to which socioeconomic status of individuals and neighborhoods influences how cities define, detect, and either treat or punish hoarding behaviors amongst residents.



[Ya-Ching Huang](#) is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Boston University. Her research interests include economic sociology, culture, morality, health and health-care. Her dissertation project on pediatric palliative care hopes to understand how clinicians, parents, and policymakers ascribe meanings to the quality of life of children facing life-threatening or life-limiting illnesses. Through this research, she aims to reveal how these perceptions influence decisions about the involvement of pediatric palliative care, the coordination of care provisions, and access to care services. Additionally, her other research investigates the production and distribution of homemade cloth masks amid the COVID-19 pandemic.



[Yasemin Girgin](#) is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Boston University. She is interested in economic sociology, work & organizations, analytical sociology, and social psychology. She holds a B.A. from Middle East Technical University and an M.A. from Boğaziçi University, both in Sociology. In her M.A. research, she studied role diversification patterns and relational dynamics of inequality in the Turkish acting field. Currently she works on talent evaluation processes in creative industries, ideologically motivated urban transformations, and socioeconomic & political impacts of natural disasters.



[Michelle Rabaut](#) is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Michigan whose work falls at the intersection of cultural and economic sociology. She is broadly interested in social media as a new technology of subjectivity, promoting certain forms of subjecthood while devaluing others. Her current research explores the cognitive and emotional labor of maintaining a social media presence and how this labor shifts across platforms and identities. Her past research has covered a range of topics such as urban farming, poverty governance, domestic violence, and sexual assault on college campuses.



[Zhen Wang](#) is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at the University of Toronto. Her research interests include organizational studies, financialization, sociology of banking, and sociology of risk. She received her B.A. in Accounting and Finance from Boston University Questrom School of Business in 2016. She then obtained her CPA and worked as a tax accountant for several years before returning to academia and earning an M.A. in Sociology from the University of Toronto. Her previous experience working for a public accounting firm and dealing with clients from the financial sector inspired her Ph.D. research, and she currently studies the behaviors of smaller regional banks in the U.S., particularly in terms of risky conduct, and how they both resemble and differ from big Wall Street banks that presently dominate economic sociology discourse.



[Erika Brown](#) is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Texas Woman’s University. She is a community-focused scholar who interrogates the lived realities of Black people under the financial system in the United States. Erika earned a B.B.A in Finance from the University of Texas at Austin and an M.B.A from the University of North Texas in Marketing. Her work draws on her experiences as a Black woman, a twenty-year veteran of corporate America, and a former employee in the field of FinTech. Her research interests include personal finance, financial (mis)education, financial (il)literacy, and wealth inequality.

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