

Daniel Schneider and Adam Reich, “Marrying Ain’t Hard When You Got A Union Card? Labor Union Membership and First Marriage,” *Social Problems*, 2014

First Comes Love, Then Comes...Union Membership?

The decline in marriage in the United States over the past five decades is well documented. Young people marry at later ages than they used to, and many more people will never marry. This can worsen existing inequalities because more advantaged people (whites, those with higher education) are more likely to marry and gain the health and wealth benefits of marriage. Over a similar period of time, labor union membership has also declined dramatically, especially among American men. Might the decline in marriage be partially caused by the decline in union representation?

[Daniel Schneider](#) and [Adam Reich](#) decided to find out. In their article, they ask whether union membership is related to first marriage for a group of men and women who were ages 14 to 22 in 1979 and have been followed since then. They found that men in a job covered by a collective bargaining agreement were more likely to get married, but women’s odds of marriage did not differ by their labor union status. Both men and women with health insurance coverage were more likely to marry in this cohort (although that may change for future cohorts due to the Affordable Care Act).

What is it about union membership that makes men more likely to marry? Is it that union jobs tend to pay more and have better benefits now? Or is having a union job a signal of job stability and future income? Schneider and Reich argue that it is largely present job stability and benefits that make men in union jobs more likely to get married, rather than union membership as a signal of future benefits.

The decline in the availability of good jobs, especially for those without a college degree, over the past 50 years may have contributed to the decline in marriage. It has certainly contributed to increasing economic inequality. In the U.S., new union jobs may support families with two markers of stability: marriage and steady income.

— Anne Kaduk, Dec 22, 2014 at 12:00 pm

<http://thesocietypages.org/reading-list/marriageandunions/>

Jackelyn Hwang and Robert J. Sampson, “Divergent Pathways of Gentrification: Racial Inequality and the Social Order of Renewal in Chicago Neighborhoods,” *American Sociological Review*, 2014

Seeing Gentrification using Google Street View

Gentrification—the process by which poor, urban neighborhoods experience economic reinvestment and an influx of middle- and upper middle-class residents—has been extensively studied by sociologists. And while researchers themselves may know gentrification when they see it, providing generalizable explanations for how and why it occurs has proven far more challenging.

Enter Jackelyn Hwang and Robert J. Sampson. In their new study on urban neighborhoods in Chicago, the two elaborate on the role of *perception* in influencing a neighborhood’s susceptibility to gentrification. In particular, Hwang and Sampson explore why certain neighborhoods of color gentrify faster than others. Referencing research on the impact of stigma on neighborhood preferences, Hwang and Sampson hypothesize that, among other things, racialized perceptions of disorder and decay attached to predominantly black and Latino neighborhoods make those areas less prone to gentrification.

To test their hypothesis, Hwang and Sampson compare present-day Google Street View images of numerous Chicago city blocks against ground-level images from a Chicago neighborhood study conducted in 1995, looking for visual indicators of gentrification such as new and remodeled structures, beautification efforts, and fewer unkempt buildings, structures, and lots than were noted in ‘95. Though signs of gentrification were more likely to be found in neighborhoods that were predominantly non-white, neighborhoods that had a substantial portion of black and Latino residents, especially those with a black population of over 40% in 1995, were far less likely to have experienced gentrification. These findings correspond with other studies on neighborhood racial preferences that claim urban-dwelling, middle-class whites prefer diverse neighborhoods but avoid those with a high concentration of blacks or Latinos because of the racialized stigmas.

Hwang and Sampson conclude that collective *presumptions* of disorder regarding neighborhoods with high black and Latino populations deter a neighborhood’s susceptibility to gentrification more than actual, *visible* signs of disorder. As the nation discusses gentrification and its effects in the outlying areas of cities like St. Louis, MO, these findings provide important insight into the impacts of racial stigma on the creation and perpetuation of (sub)urban “ghettos.”

— Stephen Suh, Dec 16, 2014 at 12:35 pm

<http://thesocietypages.org/reading-list/googling-gentrification/>

Ruth Braunstein, Brad Fulton, and Richard Wood., “The Role of Bridging Cultural Practices in Racially and Socioeconomically Diverse Civic Organizations,” *American Sociological Review*, 2014

Praying Away Group Difference

We often think of prayer as a practice that is private, insular, and personal. But new research demonstrates that prayer can also help to break down cultural barriers and create political synergy. In a recent article in the *American Sociological Review*, [Ruth Braunstein](#), [Richard Wood](#), and [Brad Fulton](#) show how racially and socioeconomically diverse interfaith groups—groups that focus on developing members’ abilities to identify community problems and hold leaders accountable through public actions—use prayer to build the kinds of collective identities that transcend differences.

When social justice organizations mobilize in political debates, they need to build bridges across diverse constituencies and interests. The authors show that people from diverse racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds can channel group differences into energy for social justice through their common commitment to prayer. The authors recount, for instance, how “an Italian American priest called everyone to prayer: ‘if you are Jewish, stand for Adonai. If you are Muslim, stand for Allah. If you are Christian, like me, stand for Jesus.’” In another setting, a Muslim leader said a prayer in which he alternated references to Allah and to God, in order to make the prayer accessible to all in attendance while also remaining true to his own faith. Such practices, the authors argue, become “opportunities for everyone to enact their shared commitment to being open-minded people,” cementing a collective sense of purpose.

The authors also find that the more diverse an interfaith group is, the more important prayer becomes for developing collective identities. Interfaith organizations that talk about race frequently, for instance, are twice as likely to use prayer as a bridging practice than groups for which race is not an issue. The effect is even stronger when for class and economics. Groups who talk a lot about economic inequality are three times more likely to build bridges with prayer than organizations that don’t focus on class. The more difficult and controversial the issues a group wants to address, the more important collective identities become, and the more useful prayer is in creating them.

The experiences of faith-based community organizations across the country suggests that diversity can be a benefit, but only if the cultural challenges of difference can be collectively embraced and directed. This study shows how prayer, when used to emphasize the social justice values that different faiths share, can create synergy between people of very different race, class, and faith backgrounds. One wonders what other cultural practices—religious or otherwise—might have similar effects.

— Jack Delehanty , Dec 8, 2014 at 07:27 pm

<http://thesocietypages.org/reading-list/praying-away-group-difference/>

Justin Farrell, “Moral Outpouring: Shock and Generosity in the Aftermath of the BP Oil Spill,” *Social Problems*, 2014

Environmental Crises and the Volunteer Identity

When disaster strikes a community, sociologists have shown that people who feel personally victimized and those who empathize strongly with victims are the most likely candidates to lend a hand. But what happens when damage crashes down on an ecosystem, rather than a city? Who comes to the rescue in an environmental crisis, and how do they focus their energies?

In a new study, sociologist [Justin Farrell](#) examines voluntary responses to the *Deepwater Horizon* explosion in 2010, when 2.52 million gallons of crude oil flooded the Gulf of Mexico. He uses longitudinal data from the Science of Generosity Survey to trace the actions of a nationally representative panel of adults before, shortly after, and one year past the spill. Although the oil spread over an enormous region, it did not directly harm any single community. Without a face to put on the disaster, Farrell notes that volunteers were largely unable to focus their energies on any one project. Instead, he shows that the *Deepwater Horizon* spill produced a general spike in voluntary contributions to a wide array of seemingly unrelated environmental projects.

Farrell argues that this case explains a great deal about what motivates volunteers in an ecological crisis. His data show that voluntary effort following the *Deepwater Horizon* spill was led by a strong push from environmentalists, Democrats, and people who identify strongly with community values. Farrell argues that these three groups harbor an identity rooted in caring for shared resources and the environment. For these people, failure to do *something* after the spill would have contradicted the values most central to their identity. In many ways, the threat becomes not only an assault on the environment, but a challenge to the volunteers’ identity. By simply acting, regardless of a central cause, the volunteers can maintain their sense of self by feeling that they contributed to a solution.

— [Matt Gunther](#), Nov 21, 2014 at 10:53 am

<http://thesocietypages.org/reading-list/bpoilspill/>

Tim Bartley and Curtis Child, “Shaming the Corporation: The Social Production of Targets and the Anti-Sweatshop Movement,” *American Sociological Review*, 2014

Who Gets Shamed for Sweatshops?

After activists targeted the company’s labor practices, Nike’s swoosh became a symbol of the ills of the global economy. But, when nearly all major clothing brands produce their wares overseas in under-supervised but certainly less expensive factories, why did Nike take the hit?

Tim Bartley and Curtis Child examine how certain corporations become the target of social movements. By focusing on the anti-sweatshop movement of the 1990s, they show that activists strategically select corporate targets, tending to focus on larger and more powerful firms and popular brands, such as Walmart, for strategic and symbolic reasons. These companies have a greater impact through their purchasing power and their iconic brands rely on public image. The bigger the target, it seems, the more vulnerable activists believe it will be, translating into more results: improved labor practices, better wages, and peer pressure on competitors.

The authors gathered data on 151 major companies in the apparel industry and thousands of media and trade journal reports on actions by advocacy groups (these included protests, leafleting, and lawsuits) meant to change labor practices in the industry from 1993 to 2000, the heyday of the anti-sweatshop movement. Smaller firms that did not have active advertising campaigns and did not have positive images were unlikely to be targeted. On the other hand, companies that already had active social responsibility initiatives, advertising campaigns, and positive public images were more likely to face the ire of activists. Further, once these “shamable” companies were targeted, they became more likely to be the focus of advocates in the future.

Bartley and Child conclude that activist’s strategies consider the cultural prominence of corporations as well as the company’s position in the global economy, determining their target’s potential to leverage social change. In this way, protest is an active social process rather than a haphazard, passionate reaction to the problems of globalization.

— Erik Kojola, Nov 10, 2014 at 03:41 pm

<http://thesocietypages.org/reading-list/who-gets-shamed-for-sweatshops/>

Fennella Fleischmann and Cornelia Kristen, “Gender Inequalities in the Education of the Second Generation in Western Countries,” *Sociology of Education*, 2014

Second-Generation Schooling: Good News for Girls

In Western societies, girls are starting to outperform boys at all levels of schooling. At the same time, many families are immigrating to these countries from areas of the world where boys still have the educational advantage. This means that there’s likely a difference in the educational expectations for boys and girls held by immigrant parents and those held by the receiving country. So what matters more for a kid’s education – the homeland or the new home country? To find out, a research team led by Fennella Fleischmann and Cornelia Kristen investigates whether second-generation immigrant girls are benefiting from the Western patterns of female success they encounter after the move.

The team draws on nationally representative data from nine receiving countries. They focus on outcomes including test scores, choice of major, college-going, and completion. To analyze this data, they use a twofold strategy, comparing gender outcomes within racial and ethnic groups. Then they compare the size of each ethnic group’s gender gaps to those of other immigrant groups and to those of the Western host country’s majority population. This tells them not only whether immigrant children have assimilated to majority trends by the second generation, but at which stage of their educational careers this happens.

The research team finds that, with very few exceptions, the female advantage in education extends to second-generation immigrant girls, regardless of their parents’ country of origin or the male advantage in that society. While those who choose to immigrate may have more progressive gender views, which may help explain these trends, the takeaway is an important one – when given the opportunity to succeed, girls will take it.

— Amy August, Oct 27, 2014 at 11:30 am

<http://thesocietypages.org/reading-list/secondgenschool/>

James M. Thomas, “Laugh Through It: Assembling Difference in an American Stand-up Comedy Club,” *Ethnography*, 2014

The Social Construction of Funny

On the surface, comedy clubs appear to occupy a relatively straightforward niche within nightlife entertainment: they are spaces where stand-up comics perform to a live audience, and where entertainment comes in the form of well-executed jokes. Through his ethnographic examination of a professional comedy club in the Midwest, however, James M. Thomas contends that there is much more to comedy clubs than simply getting a laugh.

Thomas sees the comedy club as a microcosm of the larger nightlife entertainment culture – a venue where diverse people come together to actively produce cultural arrangements that are in some ways specific to that space, but in other ways reflective of the broader culture it is located within. In the context of Thomas’ comedy club, a triad of unique social actors (the comics, the audience, and the staff) help to (re)create a *desire*-based hierarchy where specific people – namely those who are white, heterosexual, and attractive – are privileged.

For instance, Thomas reveals how even though the comedy club has open seating, staff members routinely arrange the audience so that the people in the first few rows are comprised of straight, white, affluent-looking couples. Given that these were the only rows visible from the stage, this seating arrangement influences the night’s stand-up routine in ways that reinforce the venue’s *desire*-based economy. Thomas explains that comics (most of whom were white men) pander to this visible portion of the crowd by applauding them for their attractiveness, or reciting racist and homophobic jokes that they assume will not offend them. Not all comics accepted these arrangements and norms, however. Some made jokes that actively challenged the crowd’s demographic uniformity, forcing a sense of uneasiness upon the audience as they reflected upon this reality.

Taken together, these examples illustrate how cultural meaning can be actively (re)produced (and in some cases dismantled), all within the confines of a comedy club.

— [Stephen Suh, Oct 16, 2014 at 08:27 am](#)

<http://thesocietypages.org/reading-list/socialfunny/>

Aaron M. McCright, Chenyang Xiao, and Riley E. Dunlap, “Political Polarization on Support for Government Spending on Environmental Protection in the USA, 1974-2012,” *Social Science Research*, 2014

On Climate Change, Voters Warming to Political Winds

When public officials get hyped about an issue, they usually become fodder for *The Daily Show* before they ever get voters fired up (see [Howard Dean](#)). Politicians have been polarizing the environment over the last twenty years, with Republicans increasingly arguing that climate change isn't their problem and isn't their party's issue. Does the public believe this, or do they just think their leaders are full of hot air?

[McCright](#), [Xiao](#), and [Dunlap](#) set out to test this with data from the General Social Survey taken from 1974 to 2012, using a recurring question about whether respondents thought the government was spending too much, not enough, or just the right amount on environmental protection. They found there has always been a gap between Republicans and Democrats on the issue with Democrats consistently supporting increased spending. However, while this gap held steady from 1974 to 1990, they also found that it started to grow substantially after 1990 as “conservative foundations, think tanks, and elites have mobilized to challenge the legitimacy of environmental problems.”

These findings support an argument political scientists call “party sorting theory,” which says voters will respond to cues from political leaders as they choose which side to support. For major public issues like climate change, leadership is key— it looks like voters know how to follow where the wind blows.

— [Evan Stewart](#), Sep 26, 2014 at 11:08 am

<http://thesocietypages.org/reading-list/climate/>

Carolyn Liebler, Sonya Rastogi, Leticia Fernandez, James Noon, Sharon Ennis, “America’s Churning Races: Race and Ethnic Response Changes between Census 2000 and the 2010 Census,” *CARRA Working Paper Series*, 2014

The Fluidity of Racial Categories on the Census

Sociological perspectives debunked race as a fixed or stable entity long ago, and recent analyses of the U.S. Census have shown that people’s perceptions of their own can change even in a short time span. But in what direction are these changes being made and for what reasons? University of Minnesota sociologist Carolyn Liebler, along with U.S. Census researchers, have some answers to these questions.

Comparing race responses in the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Censuses, Liebler found that 6% of the population (or 9.8 million individuals) responded with a different race and/or Hispanic origin response in 2010 than they did in 2000. More specifically, the American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) is one of the groups with a comparatively high rate of race response change. Of those who reported non-Hispanic and single-race AIAN in 2000, only half (53%) had identical responses to the questions on the 2010. Furthermore, 2.5 million Americans who identified as Hispanic and “some other race” in 2000 reported that they were Hispanic and White a decade later.

Why do individuals respond differently on these questions? And why do certain groups change at greater rates? Due to their use of matched samples, the researchers controlled for the confounding influence of population growth and ruled that out as the driving force in this trend. The changes in responses may tell us something about the social meaning and impact of being categorized in one racial group or another — including access to desired rewards or opportunities. In this case, the changing of one’s response may represent some notion of social mobility. Even satirist [Stephen Colbert picked up on the big picture](#) of Liebler’s research and quipped that Hispanics “choose” to be white. Overall, Liebler’s findings highlight clear implications for the use and interpretation of race and ethnicity data.

— [Ryan Larson, Sep 15, 2014 at 11:33 am](#)

<http://thesocietypages.org/reading-list/fluidrace/>

Fabrizio Bernardi, “Compensatory Advantage as a Mechanism of Educational Inequality: A Regression Discontinuity Based on Month of Birth,” *Sociology of Education*, 2014

Class and the Old-for-Your-Grade Advantage

As seasonal aisles are taken over by backpacks and Elmer’s glue, there’s no denying the start of a new school year. For parents of preschoolers whose birth dates are on or near the cutoff, thinking about school means deciding how early their child should begin kindergarten. While there is lots of evidence that children who are old for their grade tend to have better long-term academic outcomes, Fabrizio Bernardi’s new study shows that this is not necessarily true for everyone. It turns out that the importance of a child’s age relative to his or her classmates’ depends on the family’s socioeconomic status.

Using data on elementary school children in France, where about 20 percent of students have to repeat a grade in primary school, Bernardi investigates who is getting held back. By looking at how likely children born in different months are to be successfully promoted every year in primary school, he determines that indeed, the older students have the upper hand. However, when Bernardi compares the patterns for children of different social classes, there are stark differences among the groups. For the children of university- educated parents, there is almost no difference between being older or younger at the start of school. For the children of less educated parents, however, relative age matters significantly.

Bernardi hypothesizes that upper class children who experience an early disadvantage are more likely to catch up because they benefit from compensatory advantages. One such advantage may be in the way upper-class parents react to their children’s setbacks. For example, upper class parents might invest more resources to help a son who fails, whereas, in contrast, lower-class parents might respond by redirecting their scarce resources to his siblings, resulting in a smaller investment in him.

Looking at the big picture, this means that compensatory advantage contributes to vast educational inequalities among children from different social classes. Understanding how it operates may be a step in a journey of a million miles, but it is a step in the right direction.

— [Amy August, Aug 27, 2014 at 07:11 pm](#)

<http://thesocietypages.org/reading-list/oldforage/>