

ACCOUNTS

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GREETINGS FROM THE SECTION CHAIR

Dear Colleagues:

In August of this year, I took over the Chair of the Section from Frank Dobbin under whose leadership it continued to grow and sponsor an excellent program of sessions and roundtables at the meetings in Atlanta. The program culminated with a fine reception at a local restaurant during which the Section awards were announced.

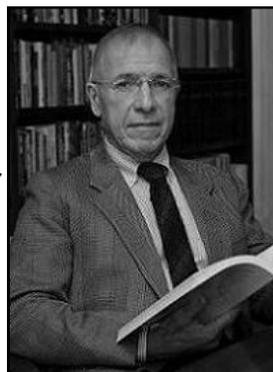
In a few years, Economic Sociology has grown to become one of the largest sections of the ASA, a pattern that reflects the increasing importance of the field for the discipline as a whole. The number of submissions to the Section's two awards – the Viviana Zelizer and Ronald Burt prizes – has also grown steadily. In response to this trend, the Section's Council has created a new award for articles only, reserving the Zelizer prize for books starting in 2011-12. The new award will be named in honor of Mark Granovetter and will be announced, for the first time, at the 2012 ASA meetings.

I plan to follow in Frank's footsteps and

those of my predecessors to consolidate the Section's presence at the leading edge of American sociology. I encourage you to assist the Council and me in this endeavor by sending us your suggestions;

submitting papers to one of the five open sessions of the 2011 Chicago program; and sending your nominations for the Zelizer and Burt awards to the chairs of the respective committees. All of the relevant information has been posted in the Section's webpage.

I look forward to seeing everyone in the Windy City and to a splendid get together next year.



- Alejandro Portes

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS ISSUE OF *ACCOUNTS*

This year, each issue of *Accounts* will focus on a different topic within economic sociology. The focus of this issue is on various aspects of organizations and institutions and their consequences for economic activity.

We begin by presenting a lively interview with Paul Willis, author of the important ethnography *Learning to Labor*. The interview explores the complex interplay

between culture, organizations, and economics as well as the importance of ethnographic methods in understanding these processes.

Next, we review *Broke, USA*, which provides a journalistic view of alternative financial services – such as payday loans – and addresses how actors in this field use moral arguments to justify economic activity that is often seen as predatory.

This issue also includes an article on the important data limitations that currently exist in conducting research linking organizational policies and practices with the outcomes of individual workers.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Accounts*. Please send any comments or questions you have to: dpedulla@princeton.edu.

- The *Accounts* Editorial Board

INTRODUCING THE 2010-2011 *ACCOUNTS* EDITORIAL BOARD

David Pedulla



David is currently pursuing a PhD in Sociology and Social Policy at Princeton University. His research interests include low-wage work, social stratification, and economic sociology. David is currently working on research projects that explore the consequences of the rise in contingent labor utilization, the implications of job search processes for racial stratification, and the consequences of underemployment. Prior to starting graduate school, David served as a Fellow in the New York City Mayor's Office and as a Research Associate at the Brennan Center for Justice.

Victoria Reyes



Victoria is a third year graduate student in the Department of Sociology at Princeton University. Her interests include globalization, interracial intimacies/encounters, and relational work. She is currently working on two projects: one examining the global structure of tourism and the other, an exploration of UN World Heritage sites. Prior to Princeton, she was a 2006-2007 Fulbright Scholar (*Philippines*) and worked at a reproductive health non-profit in Washington, DC. She is a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow.

Rourke O'Brien



Rourke is a doctoral student in Sociology and Social Policy at Princeton University. His research lies at the intersection of social stratification, inequality, and economic sociology. Specifically, he is interested in taxation, public assistance, and household finance. Before graduate school, Rourke worked on issues of asset development for low-income families as a policy analyst at the New America Foundation in Washington, DC where he continues to serve as a nonresident Research Fellow. Rourke received his B.A. in Social Studies from Harvard University.

ORGANIZATIONS, CULTURE AND ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY? AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL WILLIS

BY VICTORIA REYES

The work on embeddedness and relational approaches in economic sociology brought to the forefront the importance of social relations and culture in economic activity. In his 1977 work, Learning to Labor, Paul Willis examines how organizational structure and culture reproduce class standing through the lives of young adults on the cusp of graduating from high school. Although viewing Willis' work as relevant to economic sociology may be unexpected to both Willis himself and the members of this section, his research reveals the interplay of culture and agency within a particular organizational structure (schools) and has important implications for the reproduction of social stratification in employment, and how perceptions and meanings of labor/work influence economic decision-making.

Paul Willis is a leading ethnog-

rapher, cultural theorist and sociologist of education and work. He is currently a Lecturer with Rank of Professor at Princeton University, and the editor and founder of the journal Ethnography. Selected works include Learning to

"I WAS NOT DIRECTLY INTERESTED IN FIGURING OUT HOW THE ECONOMY WORKED SO MUCH AS HOW THE LADS WORKED ... DEFENDING THEIR HUMAN-NESS LED ME ONTO THE GROUNDS OF COMPLEX AND IRONIC SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REPRODUCTION..."

Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs (1977), Profane Culture (1978) and The

Ethnographic Imagination (2000).

Victoria Reyes: *Your work, particularly Learning to Labor (LL), lies at the intersection of culture, organizational structure and class - things very much in line with the sociological view of the economy. Do you consider yourself an economic sociologist? An organizational sociologist? Why or why not?*

Paul Willis: No and no! I did not and do not consider myself a specialist of any kind really except perhaps as having an interest in a) ethnography as trying to generate representations in relation to raw and first hand experience, elegantly presented not through [unnecessary] layers of representation and institutionalization, and b) 'culture' as a dynamic thing, as a moving and very

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INTERVIEW WITH PAUL WILLIS (*CONT'D*)

imperfect localized, always contextual, set of situated and provisional solutions to pressing problems, as felt and understood on the ground - not 'culture' as a hypostasized given.

VR: *One way to interpret your book is through a culture of poverty framework; another is as the interplay between agency and structure. What is your view on the role of culture and economics and what direction do you think the field is headed towards and/or should take?*

PW: The kids in *LL* were not 'poor' – in their own way they had a lot of dignity and some real choices, maybe the last of the relatively autonomous cultural forms of the UK working class. Now it is very different especially in the US [and Britain] with no working class birthright [jobs] and the shadows of the prison playing across the school perhaps with

“ANALYSIS MUST TRY TO SHOW
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CONDITIONS OF EXISTENCE OF
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WITH CULTURE...”

the penal framework replacing the pedagogic one. I was not directly interested in figuring out how the economy worked so much as how the lads worked, on the grounds of their then conditions of existence forged by two hundred years of industrial capitalism and a hundred years of state intervention and regulation. Defending their humanity led me onto the grounds of complex and ironic social and economic reproduction (e.g. they were not 'cycle-of-poverty' dummies or 'ideologies' zombies but wound up acting in ways which could bear those [mis] interpretations).

Now the 'economy' and interminable talk of 'the market' has come to dominate, not least culturally. It is the only discourse publically available for dealing with a number of concerns meanwhile spiriting away all kinds of other issues to do with naked power, social suffering, and domination. There is a huge ideological displacement of contradictions under the label of the market and exigencies apparently enforced by the financial crisis: ideology masquerading as necessity! The everyday experiences and culture of the 'masses' has become invisible except as pathology and problems to be solved by armies of social workers and teachers - and academics. This does not mean that everyday struggle and informal cultural production have gone away as continuing forms of everyday problem solving or that following on material effects continue to be operational in all kinds of ways. The problem is finding a non-pathological way of representing this and appropriate theoretical forms not to shackle but to bring out this world.

VR: *What do you think are the major contributions of a cultural and organizational analysis to the study of labor and the economy?*

PW: If we don't want a social physics or a social science that could relate to Mars equally as to earth, then the exploding bits of the social sciences need to be pulled back in for more holistic and publically relevant accounts of the epochal changes around us, usually credited only in passive gerunds that make everything seem to be the result of impersonal forces nothing to do with humans - downsizing, globalization, exclusion, etc.

VR: *What role does looking from the ground up - an ethnographic perspective - have for the future of economic, organiza-*

tional and cultural research?

PW: There's a healthy interest and expansion in ethnographic approaches, an interest in multi-methods which is fine. But a lot of the *ethno* lacks confidence after the 'language turn' and the post modern critique; there's too much 'cultural snacking' – looking for safe niches or pat illustrations of received theories or schools. *Ethnography* tries to do its bit, especially for young scholars, especially in seeking to transcend the institutional boundaries between sociology and anthropology, taking articles from virtually across the social sciences and asking them always to argue for a wider relevance and civic edge of some kind. I can't give specific 'area' answers except perhaps to point up the specificity of the 'fieldwork' in relation to 'theory-work' that holds true, I believe, across the disciplines and subdisciplines.

VR: *How can we take these lessons and apply them to our current understandings of the financial crisis, terrorism or other significant processes of globalization?*

PW: I don't know whether I have anything except clichés for a short answer! Think bigger and smaller! Think smaller: better recording on the ground, including re-presentation of folk meanings, freer from top down representatives/representations/framings, picking up suffering and bitterness, experience, and the full ways including 'incorrect' ones in which, and how, experience is handled in local understandings of the worlds. Think bigger: more holism, connecting up the tunnels, being unafraid of iconoclasm and making theory/developing theory do the work of illuminating its subject not perpetuating the schools.

Note: The preceding interview was conducted via e-mail.

REVIEW OF *BROKE, USA: FROM PAWNSHOPS TO POVERTY, INC.*

BY ROURKE O'BRIEN

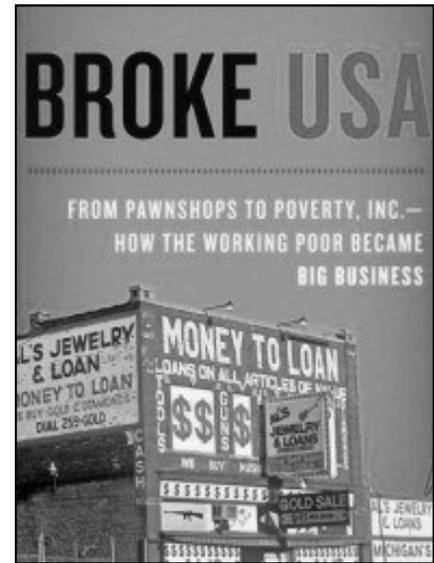
In this edition of *Accounts*, we chose to highlight a current bestseller that offers economic sociologists a gripping introduction to the business side of providing financial services to low-income consumers. Although a journalist and not an academic, Gary Rivlin's in-depth depiction of the men and women who make a living – and often a handsome profit – providing high cost financial products to low-income workers explores a number of topics of interest to sociologists analyzing institutions, economic activity and social stratification.

Broke, USA introduces readers to the world of low-income consumer financial services by profiling the men and women who market payday loans, rent to own schemes, tax refund anticipation loans, and subprime mortgages. According to Rivlin, these products, marketed by “alternative financial service providers” that are often subsidiaries of major national banking institutions, generated annual revenues of nearly \$150 billion at their peak in the mid-2000's, dwarfing the casino and tobacco industries. Yet what may be more impressive than the size of this industry is its reach: a 2009 FDIC survey administered as part of the current population survey found that 30 million American households – more than a quarter of all households – reported using alternative financial services in the past year. And, predictably, low-income and minority households are significantly more likely to turn to these alternative products.

Rivlin makes an impressive case for the need to better understand the role of financial services in social stratification. Throughout the book he describes how low-income (and even some not-so-low-income) consumers are preyed upon by businesses offering innovative financial products that promise to meet their every need. We see in Rivlin's account how relationships infuse eco-

nomic activity: trust often substitutes for understanding the fine print. Yet what is absent from Rivlin's depiction – and surely of great interest to economic sociologists – is the demand side of the equation. Who are the clients of these so-called “predatory” financial institutions? Why are they paying such high fees to take out short-term loans? Does having access to short-term credit allow families to better smooth consumption or does it trap them in cycles of debt? These questions are of critical importance to not only better understanding how the recent explosion in financial products affects the economic well-being of low-income workers but also to better informing new government policies designed to regulate this industry.

The narratives employed in describing, and justifying, “Poverty, Inc.” by those profiting off of the poor may be of particular interest to economic sociologists focusing on the role of morality in market economies. Rivlin's work provides an interesting case study as the “predatory lenders” he interviews – faced with strong opposition by advocacy groups and some government officials – often defend their trade on blatantly moral grounds. At the opening of the National Check Cashers Association's 2008 annual meeting in Las Vegas, Rivlin describes how black and white photographs of low-income customers were flashed on the screen as the chairman of the organization chanted: “They need to pay their rent. They need to feed their family. They need someone who understands them” (p.23). Indeed much of the rhetoric employed by alternative financial service providers centers on proving they aren't “evil” but instead helpful, while the consumer advocates who oppose these products have, at times, relied on biblical references to demonize the industry as money changers guilty of usury. The perceived “morality” of an industry that derives its profits from



either – depending on your vantage – providing a service to or preying on low-income Americans is central to the current struggle between advocates and regulators on the one hand and alternative financial institutions on the other.

Broke, USA is a great read and it provides readers with a unique lens for understanding this segment of the financial services industry. Like any good analysis, Rivlin's work generates more questions than answers – questions that may prove to be fruitful lines of research for economic sociologists. Who uses these alternative financial services? Does demand for these products signal they fill a gap in the market or can their success be explained by aggressive marketing? How are relationships with financial institutions stratified by race, class and gender? And how can these relationships serve to reinforce existing inequalities? What is the role of government in regulating financial service providers and on what grounds? Indeed, Rivlin's work provides economic sociologists with a research agenda that sits squarely at the intersection of organizational behavior, relational analysis of economic activity, and the broader fields of social stratification, public policy and public sociology.

MISSING THE MESO-MICRO LINK: ON THE NEED FOR BETTER EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE MATCHED DATA

BY DAVID PEDULLA

Baron and Bielby's (1980) seminal article, "Bringing the Firms Back In," made the case that scholars of social stratification needed to examine the role that firms play in the perpetuation of various forms of inequality. They argued that the firm resides at a critical place between the macro- and micro-levels of society and is a key site where inequalities in wages, power, and respect are negotiated (Baron and Bielby 1980, 743). Their article sparked significant research demonstrating that race and gender inequalities exist at workplace organizations. However, according to Reskin (2000; 2003), even after Baron and Bielby's (1980) article, sociologists still neglected developing theoretical and empirical knowledge on the *mechanisms* that underlie the production of racial and gendered inequalities at the firm.

Following Reskin's (2000; 2003) call for an analysis of organizational mechanisms in the reproduction of inequality, a recent body of important scholarship in economic sociology has examined the role of organizational policies and practices in shaping organizational inequality, specifically managerial diversity (Kalev et al. 2006; Kalev 2009). Other researchers have demonstrated the importance of organizational structure in determining whether or not workers file race and sex discrimination claims and whether those claims are verified by the government (Hirsch and Kornrich 2008). Although this line of research is central to moving forward sociologists' knowledge of organizations and inequality, it relies on organizational-level data. It does not include the experiences of individual workers within these establishments and thus is limited in terms of

identifying the link between organizational mechanisms and individual-level outcomes. Unfortunately, other analyses that do examine the interplay between organizational-level variables and individual worker's outcomes usually employ data from one, or a small number, of workplaces. The limited number of workplaces under investigation in these studies makes it difficult to identify generalizable social processes and mechanisms underlying the organizational reproduction of inequality.

The seeming lack of large-scale, na-

tionally representative research that situates individual workers within their workplaces puzzled me as a new graduate student in sociology. Why were economic sociologists and social stratification researchers not looking more fully at the relationship between organizational-level processes and individual worker outcomes?

As I started my second year of graduate school, it was time to delve into my master's thesis. Given my interests in the intersection between economic sociology and social stratification as

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THE ACCOUNTS SPOTLIGHT: SONDRAN. BARRINGER

My name is Sondra N. Barringer. I am a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Arizona and the current Graduate Student Representative for the Economic Sociology Section Council. My interest in economic sociology began when I was an undergraduate pursuing a degree in Economics and Sociology at Baylor University. Since beginning graduate school my interests have developed under the tutelage of Joseph Galaskiewicz and Scott R. Elison to center on organizational interdependencies, organizational finances, competition, economic sociology, higher education, and quantitative methods.

My dissertation research focuses on the impact of competition and stakeholder influence on the finances of higher education organizations in the United States from 1970-2009. I am working on a number of projects in addition to my dissertation research. These projects focus on the privatization of public higher education, differences between public and private non-



profit institutions, financial decoupling and cross subsidization within colleges and universities, and the state level economic impact of funding for higher education organizations.

I am looking forward to the duration of my tenure as the Graduate Student Representative for the Economic Sociology Council and to the 2011 ASA Annual Meeting in Chicago. I hope to meet many of you there! You can contact me at: sondrab@email.arizona.edu.

THE MESO-MICRO LINK (*CONT'D*)

well as the seeming gap in the literature on linking individual workers to their employers, I decided to explore the question: how does an employer's use of contingent labor relate to the subjective, material, and relational well-being of the non-contingent workers in those workplaces? I was specifically interested in how the perceived job security of non-contingent workers varied across workplaces that did and did not use various forms of contingent labor – temporary workers, on-call workers, and independent contractors.

Ethnographic evidence indicates that some contingent workers may be perceived as a threatening force by non-contingent workers and I wanted to test for that relationship using nationally representative quantitative data (Barley and Kunda 2004; Geary 1992). All I needed was to find data on employers' use of different forms of contingent labor and match that to data on how the non-contingent workers in those workplaces responded to questions about their perceived job security, relationships with management and co-workers, earnings, and benefits.

“IF WE TAKE SERIOUSLY THE FACT THAT ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES AND POLICIES ARE IMPORTANT MECHANISMS IN THE REPRODUCTION OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, THEN WE NEED BETTER DATA IN THE UNITED STATES THAT MATCHES EMPLOYERS AND THEIR EMPLOYEES.”

This task was easier said than done, which is likely one of the main reasons that few researchers are exploring the link between organizational processes and individual outcomes, beyond a small group of workplaces. There are very few datasets in the United States that match more than a few employers

to their employees. Although the U.S. Census Bureau's Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Program is a step in the right direction, it draws on administrative data sources (as opposed to survey data) and, thus, misses many of the subjective and social experiences of employees. Additionally, it does not fully capture the breadth of employers' policies, practices, and programs – such as the use of different types of contingent labor.

Thus, to my knowledge, the only data option available with the variables necessary for my proposed research question, and that had data on more than a few firms, was to match the National Organizations Survey (NOS) to the General Social Survey (GSS). In both 1991 and 2002, the NOS sample was drawn from the GSS respondents, which allows the two datasets to be merged. Merging the NOS and the GSS provides a unique dataset for analysis. The merged data provide the researcher with a large set of establishment-level variables – organizational size, age, structure, policies, and practices – on hundreds of establishments. And, it provides demographic, labor market, and attitudinal variables for one employee within each NOS establishment – occupation, job tenure, race, age, as well as attitudes about work, the social world, and public policy.

There are, however, important limitations to the NOS-GSS matched data. First, there are only 516 observations in the matched NOS-GSS dataset, which limits the statistical power of the analyst. Second, there is only data on one employee within each establishment, which constrains the types of analyses the researcher can conduct. Third, the NOS-GSS data are cross-sectional. The cross-sectional nature of the data makes it impossible to examine labor market dynamics and does not allow the researcher to use powerful longitudinal data techniques. The data limitations of the GSS-

NOS matched data proved frustrating as I built the empirical analysis for my master's thesis. Better data were, unfortunately, not available.

If, as researchers, we take seriously the fact that organizational processes and policies are important mechanisms in the reproduction of social stratification, then we need better data in the United States that matches employers and their employees. Other countries can provide a useful framework for moving forward. For example, Britain's Workplace Employment Relations Survey is much larger in scope (drawing a random probability sample of 2,295 workplaces) than the NOS-GSS matched data and surveys multiple workers within each workplace. Additionally, Canada, France, the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, and Belgium have large-scale worker-firm data sets that can be used to examine employment dynamics and the changing structure of the economy (Haltiwanger et al. 1998). While issues of respondent burden and confidentiality are important in designing these matched data sets, these challenges have been managed in other countries, providing a roadmap for the United States.

Ultimately, large-scale, longitudinal, matched employer-employee data in the United States, which combines both administrative and survey data, will open up worlds of new research questions for economic sociologists, sociologists of organizational behavior, and researchers of social stratification. Much additional theoretical and empirical work is needed to better grasp the mechanisms underlying the relationships between organizational processes and social stratification. As Baron and Bielby (1980) argued 30 years ago, it is still time to “bring the firms back in.” However, our understanding of firms' role in the reproduction of inequality will remain limited until researchers have access to better data.

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ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

2011 ASA Conference: Economic Sociology Section Sessions

1. From Embeddedness to Relational Work: A Revised Agenda for Economic Sociology

(Session Type: Invited)

Organizers: Fred Block, University of California-Davis (fblock@ucdavis.edu) and Viviana Zelizer, Princeton University (zelizer@princeton.edu)

Summary: Among economic sociolo-

gists, there has been a growing recognition of the limitations of the embeddedness concept that has oriented the field for some years. Recently, a number of scholars have coalesced around the idea that "relational work" could help us generate better understandings and useful typologies of the wide variety of ways in which economic activity is embedded. Papers in this session will pursue the possibilities created by this general notion.

2. Information Asymmetry, Uncertainty, and Markets for Lemons: How do Actors, Organizations, and Institutions Cope?

(Session Type: Open)

Organizers: Cristobal Young, Stanford University (cy10@stanford.edu) and Donald Light, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey

Summary: Information asymmetry, buyer uncertainty, and "markets for lemons" are widely found characteristics of modern markets. Various organizations exist to facilitate information or to limit information. Many of these information rules and agencies are controversial. This session invites researchers to submit original studies or theory about the causes and consequences of information problems and uncertainty.

3. Inequality and the Crisis of American Capitalism

(Session Type: Open)

Organizer: Bruce Western, Harvard University (western@wjh.harvard.edu)

4. New Institutionalism in Economic Sociology

(Session Type: Open)

Organizer: Victor Nee, Cornell University (victor.nee@cornell.edu)

5. Culture and Exclusion in the Organization of Work

(Session Type: Open)

Organizer: Alexandra Kalev, University of Arizona

(akalev@email.arizona.edu)

Summary: This session calls for papers that examine how the cultural aspects of the organization of work affect the economic disadvantages of gender, race, and ethnic groups. "Culture" may take many forms-- from a focus on cognitive schemas or discourses to an examination of organizational, political or national life.

Membership Update

By the ASA deadline of September 30th, the Section's membership reached and exceeded the 800 mark giving it an extra session in the 2011 meetings in Chicago. As of today, we number 836. At this pace, it is not improbable, that the Section will reach one thousand members in the next year. Special thanks go to the 2010-11 Membership Committee, Nina Bandelj and Alya Guseva, without whose enthusiasm and diligence this important contribution to our collective goals would not have been achieved.

Call for News & Announcements

If you have any news or announcements relevant to the ASA Economic Sociology Section, we encourage you to submit them for publication in future issues of *Accounts*. To submit an item for publication, please send an e-mail with the relevant information to David Pedulla at: dpedulla@princeton.edu.

THE MESO-MICRO LINK (CONT'D)

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