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The image of a wind farm in Spearville, KS captures the idea of resilience conveyed in this volume of *STAR*. In the foreground, a derelict windmill, once used for pumping water vital for agriculture, rests silently in a cemetery—a symbol of a bygone era. But the modern wind turbine used to generate electricity for the area, towering in the background, suggests that communities we assume to be in decline continue to thrive.

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INVITED 2013 CARROLL D.
CLARK LECTURER
AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT WUTHNOW

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY:

DANNY ALVORD
University of Kansas

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University of Kansas

Dr. Robert Wuthnow is the Gerhardt-Andlinger 52 professor of Sociology at Princeton University. His works focus on social and cultural change. His work has appeared in the top journals of sociology, and he is the author of several books and edited volumes, such as *The Consciousness Reformation*, *Small Town America*, *The Structuring of American Religion*, *After the Baby Boomers*, and many more. Dr. Wuthnow joined us to discuss his book, *Red State Religion: Faith and Politics in America's Heartland*.

ALVORD: Robert Wuthnow, thank you so much for joining us today. I really, really appreciate it. You've written so prolifically on such a wide range of topics: religion, politics, and small towns. But to start with, I'm sort of interested to hear how you would describe your sociology: what are the main themes that sort of connect everything that you do?

WUTHNOW: Well I think it's understanding one theme that runs from the beginning to now, over a number of years, it would be an interest in social change. That, of course, is pretty abstract and it leads into a number of different topics, but I remember distinctly as a graduate student at Berkeley, when I first kind of realized that I was interested in social change. I was in a class with Charles Glock, and he was interested in social change. And I remember that he drew a line on the blackboard, a sloping line, with a question mark on it, "Is this society changing for the better, or for the worse?" He was certainly convinced that it was changing. Me, having just arrived in Berkeley from Kansas, I knew what he was

talking about. I had a sense that things were changing. At least they were for me. And so, not to spell out the whole trajectory, but I got interested in changes that were happening in the '60s to some extent, 1970s, so forth, having to do with reactions to the Vietnam War, counterculture on campus, changes in religion, spirituality, new religious movements. And then, kind of took a long detour for ten years or so writing a book based on European history over four centuries (so that was certainly on social change). Then I came back to the US as a focus, looking at the development of the religious right, changes in religion, that I call the restructuring of religion. And then more recently, I've been really focusing on how common people, ordinary people, people whose voices rarely make it into the media, are experiencing change in their communities. In terms of smaller communities, Midwestern communities, many of those communities are declining in population, so they are confronting that, and other communities, such as certainly some of the ones between here and Kansas City, are growing rapidly, so they are experiencing a different kind of change.

ALVORD: So you touched on it a little bit, but in what other ways does your biography play into the development of what you became interested in?

WUTHNOW: Well, yes, as I mentioned, my biography, I mentioned that I had been a student here at KU before going to Berkeley as a graduate student, but I was raised in a very small community, a rural farming community out in the middle of Kansas. And frankly, for about the first twenty years of my life I figured that's where I would spend all of my life. Had it not been for the fact that my father died when I was a freshman in college, I probably would've done that. I would have found something to do so that I can go back and be close to my parents and live in a small town. When it became evident to me that that was just out of the question, I spent most of my time here at KU trying to figure out what on earth I was going to do. And finally, I remember watching a professor one day pacing back and forth in front of the class and lecturing from his notes and a light bulb went on in my head and I said, "I could do that!" So I was then kind of drawn into the social sciences, I didn't know which one, but I finally realized that

sociology was one that was possible to get into without too much advanced preparation. And it was also just wildly interesting in terms of the topics that one could study. So over the years, yes, I have focused mostly on sociology of religion, but I kind of fell into that almost by accident because that's not what I had planned to focus on in graduate school. I started out thinking I was going to focus on organizations, and that didn't work out. Then I wrote a dissertation proposal on race, prejudice, and did some early work on anti-Semitism. Then suddenly, some professors at Berkeley got a grant to work on religious movements and asked me to be part of that project. So I did, and I kind of meandered over the next several decades from occasionally studying religion topics and then just as often studying other things. So I have been personally interested in religion, my parents were quite interested in religion, so much so that they argued over the dinner table about it, a lot, and at times when I was getting bored with religion and thinking, "Well, certainly nobody in the American Sociological Association gives a whip about it," then all of a sudden something would happen, like the Jonestown mass suicide. So everybody [asked] "Why is that possible? How do people do that?" And Jerry Falwell comes on the scene, and the Iranian Revolution happens, and suddenly you have conservative Islamic leaders in international policy affairs. So from time to time, it's almost been events in the outside world that have called my attention back to studying religion and posing questions that I was trying to answer and find some way about what's going on with religion, politics, and society.

MCCANNON: Why the historical approach?

WUTHNOW: Well, yes, that's a good question. Partly because an interest in social change necessarily implies paying attention to some sweep of history—maybe a fairly short sweep, if one's studying social movements. For my dissertation, which was then published as a book called *The Consciousness Reformation*, there was a lot of interest in it. It was based on an original survey, but there was also this interest of mine and among my committee, in trying to understand things like secularization. So, even if churchgoing is holding stable, is it possible that people don't think about the world, and the events that shape the world in terms of

divine intervention in some way, as they might have. Another longer-term change in that project was individualism, American individualism. So to understand why people now were individualistic, and why some of them were rejecting that, I found it necessary to go back to the Horatio Alger stories, the late nineteenth century. So that was kind of an early interest in historical topics. One of my advisors at Berkeley, kind of a peripheral advisor but he was certainly there, was Robert Bellah. Bellah at the time was working on civil religion, and he was in the process of writing his book on the broken covenant, that was a historical sweep of American civil religion. And, after that, then what really got me interested in long-term history, the European history project was the rise of interest among sociologists in world systems theory from Emmanuel Wallerstein's publication of his first volume in that series in 1974, if I remember right. I that interest in world systems theory in sociology was part of a reaction against modernization theory. It was also related to the political turmoil of the period. A lot of the 1968 uprisings, in various places throughout the world, it was also related to an increasing interest I think in sociology, in political sociology, I'm thinking especially of Theda Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions*, that I was very impressed with at the time. So even though I was not a historian, I wasn't trained as a historian, I didn't have some of the language skills that I needed, I decided it would be interesting and if nothing else educational to me, to tackle some big questions about how something as major in terms of a cultural shift, and I was thinking of myself as a cultural sociologist, a cultural development as major as the protestant reformation, how was that influenced by changes in the political economy of Europe at the time? What sort of changes, especially in the relative balance of power between agrarian elites and mercantile elites, were opening up spaces for new ideas? And then put that in a comparative perspective in addition to across nation states, then to compare it with the enlightenment to see if there were any similar kind of processes in political economy, and then also, [with] that project move it forward to the rise of European socialism and see how that worked. So that was a hugely intensive investment. labor-intensive project, of intensive reading that took about ten years to work on that book.

Frankly exhausting to do something like that, and I guess I probably concluded “never again.”

So I’ve worked on more manageable projects since then. And so then coming back to working on US topics. Some of these recent ones, those have partly been inspired because I find historical reading fascinating. I enjoy looking through archives and finding letters, memoirs, and digging up old newspapers, and going around to historical societies. And I’ve also been very fortunate teaching at Princeton, to have excellent colleagues in the history department and the religion department who knew what they were doing—the history—much more so than I did. As I would look across the street and talk to them and think about what they were doing, they were often doing such interesting things. The topics, frankly, were more interesting than a lot of the boring things that we as sociologists do, so that was another impetus.

ALVORD: So, hearing you talk about your meanderings, I guess, through sociology, you’re dropping the most influential pivots, I guess. How big changes in the discipline affected you specifically. So I guess I’m wondering, how have you seen the discipline change?

WUTHNOW: Yes, how have I seen the discipline change? Well, big question. So when I very first began thinking about going to graduate school in sociology, this was in the late 1960s, and not having majored in sociology, (I didn’t know very much about it) so to just kind of take that as a benchmark to think about some of the changes sense then. Because I hadn’t majored in sociology and didn’t know anybody in sociology really, I wrote letters to a few people, and I also happened to meet someone through a friend here in Lawrence who had recently finished her PhD at Wisconsin, maybe she was still there, so I remember that conversation. There were a few others. And my question was, “Okay, I don’t know very much about sociology, I’ve read Durkheim on my own, Weber on my own, a few other things. What should I read? I’ve got some time this summer, what should I read?” Their advice was, “Talcott Parsons. You’ve got to read Talcott Parsons. He’s the guy.” I spent a lot of the summer reading everything that Talcott Parsons had written up to that point. And it turned out that that was not wasted

time. I was then faced with the decision: should I go to Berkeley or should I go to Harvard? Parsons was still at Harvard, but Harvard, even at that time, looked like a very boring place, whereas Berkeley looked like a much more interesting place. And so I wound up taking my theory required courses with Neil Smelser, who was a student of Talcott Parsons, and so we heard a lot about Talcott Parsons in the general theory course and then there was a special seminar, actually on Parsons' theory itself. So take that as a starting point, and certainly recognize that even at that time—and certainly over the next decade—there was this huge reaction against Parsons and everything that Parsons stood for. The four fold boxes, and the systematic theory, and the social evolution, societal evolution stuff. The only way that that retained an interest for me because of Bellah, who as I mentioned before, was there. I took a class from him and he was also a student of Parsons. So he had written a little short essay on religious evolution, included quite a bit of that in his course and recently, in the last ten years after he retired, returned to it and wrote a huge book that was published before he died on religious evolution. But being at Berkeley, even though it was a very good department then, as it is now, being there in the late sixties into the mid-seventies, there was much less attention on anybody's part to what was happening in the discipline of sociology, than was what was happening on the streets, and on campus. I mean, I lived a block from Black Panther headquarters; I frequently circumvented clouds of teargas to get to the sociology department; I was there during people's park strike, the third world strike, the counterculture shutdown, all of those things. So those of us of my cohort who were experiencing what was going on in the society at that time, and then either dropping out, as some did, or returning to sociology, that was an impetus for a lot of people to be interested in social movements, social change, and political sociology. Theda Skocpol is about my cohort at Berkeley, Ann Swidler, Jeff Alexander, Erik Olin Wright were all in the same classes I was. So it was a kind of an exciting time of change.

Moving forward, my view at least, is that the discipline expanded for a while to take account of some of those very practical human interests. It expanded to be more inclusive, certainly in terms of interest in gender, race, sexual orientation, and

international comparative issues. And then at some point, the discipline also contracted. And at this point, I think there's actually quite considerable division in the discipline at large between those who want to erect high walls around the discipline and say that it should be rather narrowly confined to a certain kind of neo-positivist methodology (probably quantitative), emulating the sciences, taking seriously the idea of replication, proof, and prediction, hypothesis testing... versus others in the discipline who are still a little bit more inclusive and more interested in the policy or at least the practical application of sociological research.

ALVORD: In your book, *Red State Religion*, you're making the argument that red state religion and red state politics that we see today have a long and complicated history. You're using specifically Kansas and Texas, although, it sounds like Texas is going to be more explored in your next book. So why Kansas and Texas, and how general do you intend the term "red state religion" or "red state politics" to be applicable outside of Kansas and Texas?

WUTHNOW: Well my interest in *Red State Religion* began some years ago with a broader interest with the religious right and the growth of religious conservatism connected to political conservatism starting in the late 1970s with the moral majority, and with Ronald Reagan, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, that whole tradition of religious right leadership that's been studied a lot. My reason for then eventually coming back to that topic and focusing on Kansas was of course partly autobiographical. But I thought it was also a valuable potential case study to understand both over a longer historical period what might be happening that led up to the religious right in the 1980s, and as a more specific case study, making it possible to look at local conditions, and then how those local conditions influenced county and state politics. My reason for choosing Kansas was that Kansas has been Republican—maybe moderate Republican, progressive Republican, but it has been Republican over a longer period by a wider margin more than any other state. So it's kind of an interesting case study of looking at the extreme case and saying, "Okay, in recent years, Kansas has been controversial because of textbook controversies, that

evolution/intelligent design, and so forth. It's been controversial because of massive anti-abortion protests, controversial because of the constitutional ban of same-sex marriage, and a whole variety of things.

So that poses the question, "Is all of this somehow new? Does it contradict something earlier in Kansas' history?" Which, in simplistic terms, is what Thomas Frank argued in his widely-read book *What's the Matter with Kansas?* And I frankly didn't know. When I began to think about Kansas, I vaguely remembered from seventh-grade Kansas history that the Wyandotte Constitution of 1859 had included a prohibition clause. It didn't pass, but it almost did. And the temperance movement was very strong from the very beginning. So I thought, "Well, maybe I'm going to find a story that's one-thing-lead-to-another." It's a conservative state now; it's always been a conservative state. But then as I began seeing that women's suffrage, for instance, was a very important movement in Kansas in the 1860s, and populism was a very important movement in the 1890s, and that began to complicate the picture. And I realized, "Well, I really want to just look closely at the whole 150-year history, and not try to make any single, sound bite, sweeping generalization about it, but to say, you know, from decade to decade, here are some of the things that changed. And I finally wound up making an argument about the recent prominence of the religious right that in some ways was similar to what I had written earlier about the national rise of the religious right. But in Kansas, it was really much more important to look at who had moved into the state, especially the massive influx of Southern Baptists starting in World War II, then really picking up in the 1960s. So that there were just large numbers of Southern Baptists in Kansas, where there had never been any before. They were coming in from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and Missouri. They were much more conservative and became more active politically than a lot of other groups had.

Then the other big change was that after *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, the large population of Catholics in Kansas that had always leaned towards more Democratic candidates switched, and they began supporting conservative Republican candidates. So between their support, and the support of conservative Southern Baptists, who were also voting for conservative Republican candidates, as well as

some independent megachurches that were capable of mobilizing against abortion or whatever it was, over the period of twenty years or so there was this huge religiously conservative coalition of sorts supporting conservative candidates in Kansas. So having finished that, I've also always kind of just vaguely interested in Texas, I thought, "Well, it would be interesting, since Kansas was historically Republican and Kansas was a free state, against slavery and a whole variety of things, what about Texas?" Because one of the things that was clear about Kansas, even though there aren't many African Americans in the population in Kansas, race is very important. And in recent years, Latino immigration has been very important in Kansas. So I thought Texas would be ideal because it is in the south, because it did have a history of slavery, because over most of its history it voted for Democratic candidates (although more recently, Republican candidates), has a large African American population, has a large and growing Latino population.

ALVORD: At the beginning of your book, you raise a pretty interesting paradox. It's why, how, and under what conditions have states that have traditionally had a pretty strong separation of church and state, how did religion and politics mix so much? And you point to two specific turning points: the 1920s, with prohibition and specifically, the election of 1928; and also 1964, which you really seem to stress. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what was happening during those times that what allowed for religion and politics to mix in such a unique way.

WUTHNOW: So in 1928, the mobilizing factor that brought a lot of Protestant clergy into the political arena as mobilizers and activists was the candidacy of Al Smith, as a Catholic democrat. Their concerns about him in Kansas were partly because he was a democrat and partly because he was from New York, but also because he was a Catholic. And as I said before, Catholics in Kansas had always voted democratic for the most part. Catholics, for geological reasons and ethnic reasons, had never been very keen on prohibition. So the fear of these Kansas Protestant clergy—and this is true of Texas, too, Protestant clergy there—was if Al Smith was elected, prohibition would be repealed—which it

was in 1933, but they were already concerned about that, or that it wouldn't be enforced. That was almost as much of a concern; that is what mobilized Carrie Nation, she thought it just wasn't being enforced. So there was that, and there was also this longstanding fear of Protestants that Rome and Catholics and so forth and the Vatican were trying to take over and turn the American government into a theocracy of some kind and pay homage to the Pope, all these things. So they considered it a matter of religious freedom, among other things, to get involved in politics to protect their religious freedom, as they said. So that was the part of separation between church and state that could be interpreted that way. Yeah, you don't want any church to become a political establishment, and so maybe you vote for somebody or organize movements to oppose that. At any rate, that whole phenomenon centered around 1928 created a precedent for people who otherwise might not have considered it appropriate to bring religion into politics to do so.

Then moving forward to 1964, the issues were really rather different. In 1964, it was partly—this was Goldwater against LBJ—and Goldwater didn't do very well at all, in the final analysis. But Johnson, of course, had come in after the assassination of Kennedy, with the intention, even though he was a Texan, a Democrat, of passing the civil rights legislation that had been advocated for civil rights movement at that point and probably would have been passed by Kennedy if had not been assassinated. And so there was a reaction among some of the white clergy just against desegregation and racial inclusion and civil rights. But what surprised me was the extent to which moral politics, just moral issues, became important. And those had partly to do with race, because there the moral argument was, "Oh, look at all these terrible, immoral civil rights demonstrators who were breaking the law. We can't trust them. They're just not the kind of people we want in America." But it also had to do with the sexual revolution, which was already starting. Pills were legalized in 1961 or 2. It also had to do with the baby boomers coming of age and the older generation looking at them and seeing that they're starting to dress in miniskirts and going to dances and listening to rock and roll, and all these terrible things. And so it was Billy Graham, who was out there having his massive crusades and preaching against

moral decay. In 1963, 1964, there was Ronald Reagan, campaigning for Goldwater, talking about moral excesses of big government and wasteful welfare spending. And one of the more interesting episodes related to 1964, there was the Walter Jenkins episode. Jenkins had a homosexual encounter, who was an aid of Johnson. One of the more interesting broader developments was the organization of a movement called "Mothers for a Moral America." They were actually be organized by some of Goldwater's staff. Some of Goldwater's staff produced a thirty-minute film that was to be aired right before the election on Goldwater's behalf, that basically suggested that because of Johnson, and everything that was going on, America was going to hell in a hand basket, in terms of morality. It starts out with a picture of a careening black limousine, that made you think maybe that's Johnson with a beer bottle flying out the window that's careening down the road. And it flips over to riots in the street, and it even includes some censored photos of strip clubs and nude dancing, I mean it was just totally over-the-top. And then it lines up with somebody, I forget another actor, might be... I don't remember who it is, but somebody who has a big rifle on the wall behind them, and saying "We good people have to be trustworthy citizens, and moral, and all this." Anyway, it was so over-the-top that Goldwater, when he first saw it, he was campaigning in Philadelphia at the time, he said, "No. We absolutely cannot do this." Especially because they were just racist themes all the way through it. So no, we can't do it. Mothers for a Moral America got ahold of it and they distributed it all over the country in churches! And so that certainly mobilized a lot of conservative churches, Protestants, especially. But interestingly enough, on the other side, and this was with respect more specifically to the Jenkins controversy, some of the most prominent theologians including Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, and Abraham Heschel, several others, came out in favor of Johnson and said, "Johnson's doing the right thing; civil rights is way more important than these kind of petty moral issues."

So at any rate, all of that actually became a starting point, especially as the Goldwater supporters just went away licking their wounds, thinking, "What can we do?" And a number of them retrenched, dug in, figured out, "Okay, what do we need to do?"

And Ronald Reagan happened to be one of them, and so we can see that moving forward into the religious right. One other thing about this issue of moral politics more recently... what happens now, and I've seen this more in Texas project than in Kansas, at least thinking about it in Texas, is the conservative preachers will say it's okay to talk about politics, a certain kind of politics, even from the pulpit, and even, for that matter, to implicitly endorse certain candidates, because they see all that through moral terms. Which they say, "Oh, that's what we should be about. We should be talking about that." So they focus on, usually, one or two issues: abortion, usually, or marriage equality, or in some cases, Obamacare, or whatever it might be. And so what they do, whether they realize it or not, is that they advocate for voting Republican. So the people in their churches, whether they happen to be white churches, you can imagine, whether they happen to be upscale, college-educated people, or downscaled people, who in Texas are called "the Bubba voters," vote Republican. And because that constituency of white Anglican voters is shrinking, what you need is a high turnout and a higher percentage for Republican candidates, which those moral and social issues help to provide. So then if you ask those preachers—which we've done—"Do you favor helping the poor?" "Oh yes, certainly, we do." "Are you a racist?" We don't ask it that way, but we try to find out, and no, no they certainly are not, and they maybe aren't even against immigrants or whatever. So inadvertently by supporting those certain moral political issues, which therefore give the Republicans a winning majority all the time, they have essentially disenfranchised the poor and minorities, and made sure that none of the social welfare programs that those people need ever get passed... and that the Democratic candidates that those people are more likely to support never win. That's the kind of red state phenomenon. I don't know if this applies very broadly, if we go back to your original question. If one studied Iowa, or Indiana, or in recent years, Oklahoma, or even Ohio, I think some of the same things apply, but I'm also convinced that state and local politics matter so much that one has to take account of the differences in the configuration, the population, and also the history of those different locations.

ALVORD: It's so interesting. So it sounds like it was... are you able to make a causal claim, I guess is what I'm trying to say. Was it religion getting into politics? Then, the politicians were savvy and said, "Hey we can use this." Or are you able to make a causal claim?

WUTHNOW: No, not really. You can't make any kind of direct, linear causal claim. You can see causality working in both directions at different times. And in Kansas' history, that's certainly the case. You can see times when it looks like religion and politics are mixing, and they're not. Other times when it looks like the political leaders are kind of making use of the religious leaders, and other times the reverse is happening. That said, I suppose of it looking like religion and politics are really mingling is the story that I start the book with, which is the story of Abraham Lincoln coming to Atchison, Kansas in 1859 and speaking in a Methodist Church. While the Methodist leaders were quite excited to have him, it turns out that the Baptist leaders (that was kind of the second-largest group in Atchison) probably would not have had him because they were mixed as far as slavery was concerned. Some of them were for it; some of them were against it. But the real reason Lincoln spoke in a Methodist church was that it was the only large hall available, so it would hold 350 people or so, and so that made sense. The Baptist church was about a month away from being completed, and it was nicer and it was larger, so if it had happened a month later it might have happened in the Baptist church. And when he went on to Leavenworth, they had a big public hall of some kind so he didn't speak in a church there at all.

The same thing later on with the suffragists: Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, speaking in Methodist churches as well as they traveled around the state. In small towns, that's usually the only place there was to meet. So if anybody benefited in those early years, it was often that the clergy or a particular church congregation even might benefit just from the publicity of having somebody certainly like Lincoln come and speak or later on, many temperate leaders, many governors spoke in churches. And so what you see there, which I think is still true in many cases, is you have a political leader who is sincerely a person of faith, Protestant

or Catholic, maybe they have been involved themselves in church work, as Governor Allen in Kansas history, was an example. Maybe they are quieter about their own faith, as Governor Capper was. Maybe they are much more outspoken about it, as the current Governor Brownback is, or in Texas, Rick Perry. And so in those instances, the personal faith means that the political leader can sincerely go to certain meetings, say certain biblical things, pray, invoke God's blessings, all of those things, and at the same time, know that it's not going to hurt the political cause either because there is a lot people out there who value that, who think that it's great. It's a little harder to identify the exact religious connections currently with the Tea Party than it was earlier with the prolife movement. That's because the Tea Party's primary emphasis is fiscal conservatism, and so what on earth about religion or theology would lead one to believe in fiscal conservatism. It turns out there are a bunch of arguments... but for any of those arguments it's just as easy to find counterarguments. So that's why people who are studying the Tea Party note that there are a lot of religious people involved with it. The question is still open as to whether they still happen to be there because they were already mobilized for conservative causes—because of abortion and marriage equality—or are they there because they actually thought through the issues?

That's the unanswered question about the Tea Party, I think.

ALVORD: A final question: what kind of lessons do you want people—not just academics, but anybody—to take away from your study, your *Red State Religion* book?

WUTHNOW: Well, I thought about that a lot. I even thought it would be interesting at some point to write a short essay titled, "What I Learned in Kansas." One of the things I would certainly stress (assuming the audience we are speaking about is sociologists, broadly defined, rather than the general public) I would emphasize paying attention to stories, to narratives. There is a lot of interest in sociology in those. I would emphasize, if looking at any of these religious and political issues, the importance of local context, state context, if it has to do with politics at all. I would emphasize looking at the grassroots as far as

possible—whether that’s through stories, interviews, or whatever. Gender, then, becomes an issue especially for historical studies because so often leaders were men that you miss the women if you don’t. A lot of the interesting grassroots stories come from women—you deal with gender, family, and children and so forth. I would also emphasize race, because race is such an important point of inflection in our culture that even people who are studying, let’s say Korean-American churches are finding that notions of race and the history of race in our culture inflects those investigations. And finally, as a concept, a kind of narrow, specific, sociological concept, I would emphasize the idea of symbolic boundaries, which I began to look at a little bit back in the 1980s, in thinking about the restructuring of American religion, which my former colleague, Michèle Lamont, who is now at Harvard, has written about. My current colleague, Andreas Wimmer, who works on comparative ethnicity, has written very masterfully about beginning to understand more of the ways in which symbolic boundaries become salient at certain times, become politically effective, become related to differences in social networks, and then, because of various kinds of mobilization or even demographic changes, begin to be reconfigured and that is a kind of abstract concept. It’s the one I’ve found most recurring in the Kansas project and the Texas project. The Texas book will have a long, boring final chapter that talks about that.

ALVORD: Well, it’s absolutely fascinating and interesting, and you’re fascinating and interesting, and I could just talk to you forever, but Robert Wuthnow, thank you so much for your time.

WUTHNOW: Thank you.

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AMERICA'S HEARTLAND: A CASE FOR SOCIAL RESILIENCE?

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Abstract

Much has been written in recent years about the decline, problems, distinctive traditions, and political conservatism of small rural "heartland" communities. I discuss the important place that rural communities occupied in the development of modern sociological theories, the focus of recent empirical studies of these communities, and the arguments that have been advanced about population decline and the stultifying effects of closed social networks. I then describe evidence that supports arguments about social resilience in small rural communities, including recent demographic figures about population stability, data on social capital and open networks, and qualitative information about small-town values and lifestyles.

Introduction

Heartland is a nonspecific term used more commonly in the media and in literature than in social science. Unlike homeland, which has been used to designate the entire United States since the attacks on September 11, 2001, heartland connotes an ill-defined part of the nation, a central geographic region in which traditional values prevail. In blogs and newspapers, the heartland is typically the Midwest, small towns, and places distant in space and time

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from large cities and centers of recent immigration or technological innovation. Although the heartland in these accounts is a place in which something wholesome and somehow genuinely American is found—"the real America," as political candidates sometimes argue—it is also associated with the past and decline more than with the future and growth.

Imagining the heartland as a Venn diagram where the closest meaning occurs at the intersection of three overlapping circles provides a more precise definition of the term. The first circle refers to the part of the nation that lives in rural areas, which included 19 percent of the US population in 2010. The second circle refers to small towns with populations less than 25,000, of which there were approximately 15,000 in 2010 that were located outside of census-defined urban areas. The third circle refers to inland parts of the nation, which extend from West Virginia and Tennessee to Wyoming and Idaho, and from North and South Dakota to Oklahoma and Arkansas, and regions that exclude California and Florida, but include parts of Texas and Upstate New York. In recent presidential elections, a majority of inland states have voted Republican, which is one of the reasons that the term heartland is associated in media accounts with conservative politics and traditional values.

Heartland in this conception includes, but is not restricted to, topics that have been of central interest in rural sociology. In addition, the values, beliefs, and public connotations associated with the term are of particular interest among cultural and political sociologists. These cultural and political topics refer as much to particular constructions of space and time as they do to actual places and populations. Studies emphasizing these topics include investigations of where people think the heartland or particular regions such as the Midwest or "Middle West" are located (Shortridge 1989), analyses of local and regional subcultures in literature and music (Griswold and Wright 2004; Peterson 1999), and discussions of nostalgia, attachments to place, notions of home, and arguments about authenticity (Erickson 1995; Cameron and Gatewood 1994).

Although sociological interest sometimes focuses on regional geography, the more relevant analytical aspects of heartland in these terms are the relatively small size of populations involved in

considering the social and cultural dynamics of families, neighborhoods, and communities; the relative economic importance of agriculture, agribusiness, and extractive industries such as mining, oil, and gas compared with manufacturing, services, and the professions; and the effects of location, race and ethnicity, and cultural legacies that may combine to forge distinctive values, beliefs, and identities. From its inception, the sociological literature has dealt extensively with questions about these aspects of demography, economic structure, and culture, and in recent years has developed theoretically grounded arguments about social change in the communities and regions involved. At the same time, sociological interests are sufficiently concentrated on topics located in large urban places and presumed to be of greatest relevance there, such as urban neighborhoods, urban poverty, urban schools, urban segregation, and urban ethnicity and immigration. Therefore, examining topics outside of these places necessarily provides opportunities for interesting comparisons.

The classic theoretical formulations were so closely associated with observations about the shifts from agrarian to industrial society and from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* that tracing these arguments is tantamount to reviewing the entirety of the discipline's intellectual development. I will begin with a brief survey of several of the most formative of these ideas. Next I will discuss several perceptions of small-town and rural America that have been evident in the more recent theoretical literature. Then I will sort out the particular arguments that have emerged in the empirical literature about the decline of small, rural, tradition-minded communities. Those considerations then serve as the basis for examining each aspect of decline to determine whether there may also be indications of potential social resilience. I argue that although there are serious aspects of decline in many heartland communities, there are also important resources that can and do serve to bolster the resilience of some of these communities. In broader terms, my argument is not only about heartland resilience, but also about the need for sociologists to reconsider taken-for-granted assumptions about social capital, demographic and economic change, and conservative politics.

Classical Formulations

Current perspectives on topics connoted by the heartland may be shaped by practical concerns and empirical observations, but it is difficult to imagine that classical theoretical formulations are not factors as well. The writers who founded the discipline during the latter half of the nineteenth century and first years of the twentieth century were acutely aware of the social changes accompanying industrialization and urbanization. Many of their theoretical arguments were framed by personal experiences with these changes. They wrote about the enlarged scale of modern urban life, how social relations were different there than in small communities, and what the challenges were for understanding societal cohesion and inequality. When considering how sociology in the twenty-first century is shaped by globalization, immigration, racial and ethnic diversity, and information technology, it is beneficial to remember that the discipline's founders were similarly influenced by the significant social, demographic, and political changes of their day.

Durkheim's childhood in the small town of Épinal, France, and adult life in Paris is exemplary of the changes that many of his contemporaries experienced. His work repeatedly returns to the question of how large complex social settings differ from smaller ones. Mechanical solidarity assumes the presence of homogeneity and a lack of functional differentiation, whereas organic solidarity features a more complex division of labor. References to people and places can be more specific in the former than in the latter where abstractions become the necessary accoutrement of experiential diversity. The rituals that bind people together in small tribal societies must be replaced, he thought, by symbolic representations of the collectivity that are somehow still naturally experienced but capable of transcending particular locations as well.

Tönnies's contrast of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* paralleled his transition from a farmer's son living in rural Nordfriesland, Germany, to teaching at the naval port town of Kiel, Germany, which grew from less than 20,000 occupants in 1864 to 200,000 in 1910. *Gemeinschaft* was rural, premodern, familial, neighborly, small-scale, and empathic. *Gesellschaft* was urban, modern, individualistic, large-scale, and impersonal. Although Durkheim

entertained doubts that social cohesion could be preserved in large interdependent societies, Tönnies considered the connection of people to places, regions, climates, buildings, and even the soil so powerful that he wondered if the adjustments to large urban contexts could happen at all and whether more was to be lost than gained by this transition.

A generation later, Louis Wirth (1938) adopted many of the perspectives evident in the work of Durkheim and Tönnies, as well as Simmel and Park, in formulating his theory of urbanism as a way of life. Wirth moved from Gemünden in Hunsrück, Germany, population 900, to Omaha, population of 100,000 in 1911, and then to Chicago. He considered Chicago sociology's focus on urbanism, the lens through which all the salient problems of contemporary society could be understood. At the same time, he was acutely aware that these were indeed problems and that they included segregation and conflict, anonymity, superficiality, insecurity, and instability.

Several themes carry forward to subsequent thinking about the contemporary heartland. Whatever may have been attractive or unattractive about small rural places, those places were arguably declining in reality and in theoretical importance. Apart from the nostalgia that may have shaped normative arguments, the central arguments on which scholars agreed included the idea that small rural places were relatively homogeneous and therefore comfortable and convenient in terms of generating social cohesion. Interpersonal relationships were emotionally gratifying, but could also be stultifying, as Durkheim argued in a critique of Tönnies (Aldous 1972). There was a taken-for-granted-ness about these places and relationships. They attractively included enduring, affective relationships, but ran counter to the rational instrumental calculations that were conducive to progress in business, education, and science. In retrospect, it is not difficult to see that many of these arguments were consistent with popular images of a heartland in which traditional values prevail and are somehow threatened by changing social conditions.

Subsequent Contributions

Theoretical perspectives reflecting and shaping perceptions of small-town and rural America after World War II stemmed not

only from greater awareness of the contributions of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, but also from the social realities of the postwar era. Among these were suburban life, the recent history of mass mobilization by totalitarian regimes, and the current specter of the Cold War and possibilities of nuclear annihilation. Modernization provided a narrative that put America in the lead among industrialized and developing nations. It highlighted the benefits of science, technology, higher education, urban life, the arts, cultural sophistication, tolerance, and universalistic values. It also posed questions about mass conformity, anonymity, the potential loss of individuality, and resistance from segments of society being left behind. Broad-gauged descriptions of American society that appealed to popular as well as to scholarly audiences, such as David Riesman's *Lonely Crowd* (1950) and C. Wright Mills' *White Collar* (1951), emphasized the current direction of cultural developments and how they contrasted with the past.

Varying perceptions of small-town and rural America emerged in these formulations. Riesman's concept of an other-directed personality emphasized the potential loss of a strong moral compass that presumably was more evident in small communities than in large suburbs, as well as insecurities about self-identity and a desire for emotional attachments. Mills' description of the emerging middle class also emphasized problems that had not been present in the past in smaller communities, such as overweening bureaucracy and a loss of personal independence. In contrast, Eric Hoffer's *True Believer* (1951) underscored the more extreme dangers of mass society in facilitating fanaticism, but also hinted at the lingering tendencies toward fanaticism among marginalized groups in rural contexts. Richard Hofstadter's *Age of Reform* (1955) provided a balanced account of the agrarian ideal that had shaped American culture, but also hinted at the critique of provincialism that was to emerge more fully in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963) and *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1965).

In broader theoretical terms, Parsons' pattern variables closely resembled Tönnies' discussion of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* in characterizing the differences between particularistic and universalistic values, diffuse and specific identities, and expressive and instrumental attachments. In essays applying functionalist

analysis to contemporary issues, Parsons made frequent references to the differences between households in farming communities and households in cities. Despite Parsons' emphasis on societal integration and social cohesion through shared values, the underlying theme in discussions of societal evolution was that the values and social patterns associated with small towns and rural communities were things of the past and were destined to diminish in importance (Parsons 1942, 1971).

As theories of modernization lost popularity in the 1970s, small towns and agrarian societies ceased to serve as reminders only of a declining past. Interest in uprisings, rebellions, and social movements drew attention to the ways in which rural populations participated in these events. Agrarian landlords, peasants, and colonized plantation workers came to the fore in the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, Jeffrey Paige, and James C. Scott, among others. Populist protests in U.S. history also received new attention. Although much of this work cast agrarian populations in a more dynamic light, little of it dealt with current farming and small towns. With the exception of several important empirical studies, the best conclusion that could be drawn about heartland America was that its continuing decline was inevitable and its scholarly importance was negligible.

A recent argument that illustrates the continuing influence of earlier formulations holds that societies can be characterized by certain prevailing traits, such as the extent to which they are dominated by industrialization or urbanization. Erik Olin Wright and Joel Rogers (2010) identify several traits that characterize the contemporary United States, including most basically its dependence on global capitalism, which in turn implies large corporations, weak labor unions, wage labor in industry and services, and state involvement in facilitating and regulating commerce. They argue that technological innovation has enabled more of the population to live in cities and to spend their time on tasks other than producing food. They emphasize that nearly everyone in the past devoted their time to producing food, whereas currently less than 2 percent of the U.S. labor force works in agriculture. In 1860, only 20 percent of the U.S. population lived in cities, whereas at the start of the twenty-first century, 80 percent did. The important questions that derive from this characterization

concern large-scale social relations rooted in global capitalism, rather than issues pertaining only to the small and obviously declining part of the population that lies on the margins of these developments.

A second argument has been advanced in the theoretical literature on social capital. According to this argument, the social networks that prevail in small towns and rural areas may be strong, but have deleterious effects on the populations involved. For example, in Alejandro Portes' widely cited review essay on social capital, he identifies "cozy intergroup relations" that impose high demands for conformity as a kind of "negative social capital" (1998:16). He writes, "In a small town or village, all neighbors know each other, one can get supplies on credit at the corner store, and children play freely in the streets under the watchful eyes of other adults." But if that sounds like the ideal community in which many people say they would like to live, he continues: "The level of social control in such settings is strong and also quite restrictive of personal freedoms, which is the reason why the young and the more independent-minded have always left."

Empirical Studies

Research on small towns and rural areas has been relatively sparse compared with the number of studies conducted in Chicago, Miami, Los Angeles, and other cities, as well as on the national population as a whole. Ethnographic studies during the late 1940s through the 1960s followed the pattern established by the Lynds' Middletown research in the 1920s and 1930s, and included such notable works as Vidich and Bensman's *Small Town in Mass Society* (1968) and W. Lloyd Warner's Yankee City series. These studies regarded small towns as societal microcosms and explored class and power relations and local institutions while focusing relatively little attention on whether towns were declining or how they compared with larger communities. As comparison studies were done in suburban locations, concerns about the anonymity of mass society were largely put to rest. Suburban residents seemed to be replicating the same supportive social ties noted in small towns.

A second line of research developed in the wake of the farm crisis that occurred during the late 1970s and 1980s. The Carter administration's restriction on exports of American grain to the

Soviet Union and the steep rise in fuel costs in conjunction with the OPEC oil embargo resulted in farm incomes plummeting and thousands of farmers being forced to discontinue farming. Research examined the effects on farm families, including studies of teenagers and schooling, relationships of grandparents with parents and grandchildren, divorce rates, and household finances (Lobao and Meyer 1995; Elder and Conger 2000). Small farms appeared to be in danger of being replaced by large agribusiness conglomerates and the declining farm population implied that small, farming-dependent towns would decline as well. Although several studies suggested that small towns and rural areas were being revived by new residents fleeing from cities and perhaps even by the countercultural back-to-land movement, analysis of 1970 and 1980 census data failed to bear out those expectations (Fuguitt, Brown, and Beale 1989).

Studies conducted during and since the 1990s have taken three distinct directions. The first includes normatively neutral studies that describe the continuing complexity and variations of farming communities, farm families, farm management styles, and small towns in rural areas (Bell 2004; Bell and Finney 2006; Salamon 1992; Macgregor 2010). These studies show the challenges facing rural communities and also provide a basis for considering their resources and possibilities for resilience (especially Brown and Swanson 2003, and Brown and Schafft 2011). The second direction takes as a given that small towns and rural areas are declining and focuses on documenting the extent of this decline and its consequences. Studies of this kind have examined the exodus of college-bound young people from rural communities (Carr and Kefalas 2009), the depopulation and shuttered businesses that have been wrecked by global competition (Longworth 2007), the tragedy of drug use that comes with alienation and despair in small towns (Reding 2009), and the conflicts and hardships brought about by agribusiness (Stull and Broadway 1995). The third direction focuses less on small towns and rural areas and more on the presumed backwardness and reactive politics of heartland populations that are apparently guided by the values that once prevailed in rural America (Frank 2004). In addition, census data and journalistic coverage have documented broad patterns of change in small towns and rural communities.

Population decline is well-documented. Between 1900 and 2010, the rural population—defined as residents not living in places of 2,500 or more—fell from 60 percent of the total population to only 19 percent. In absolute terms, 18 states experienced net decline in rural residents in the 1980s, and 25 did in the 1990s. Although some of the decline occurred because of increases that pushed the population above the 2,500 figure for being counted as rural, the most significant losses occurred in agricultural states such as Iowa, Nebraska, and North Dakota. Depopulation across the Great Plains appeared so sufficiently serious and long-lasting that the U.S. Census Bureau commissioned special studies to assess its causes and effects. The idea of turning the region into a vast Buffalo Commons gained popularity in journalistic treatments. Broader interest in depopulation continued as subsequent census figures were released. An Associated Press headline prompted by the release of 2012 population estimates, for example, declared, “Record 1 in 3 Counties Now Dying Off, Hit by Aging Population, Weakened Local Economies” (Yen 2012).

Population decline was evident at the municipal level as well. Between 1980 and 2010, 62 percent of all nonurban towns with fewer than 1,000 residents in 1980 experienced net population decline. Among towns with 1,000 to 1,999 residents in 1980, 47 percent declined. Population decline occurred in 43 percent of towns with 2,000 to 4,999 residents in 1980, and in 42 percent of towns with 5,000 to 9,999 residents in 1980. It was also true of 38 percent of towns with 10,000 to 24,999 residents in 1980 (Wuthnow 2013). A study of the nine states that had the largest proportion of towns with populations less than 1,500 in 1980 (all in the Middle West) showed that 64 percent of the towns in those states had smaller populations in 2005 than in 1980. The highest proportions were in Kansas and North Dakota, where 70 and 89 percent of towns respectively lost population (Wuthnow 2011).

The Middle West study showed that towns with declining populations were ones in which population was already declining between 1950 and 1980, and in many cases between 1910 and 1950. The smallest towns were most in danger of losing population. Other factors conducive to population decline included not being a county seat, not having a college or community college, not being near an interstate highway, and being farther from an

urban center. A significant decline in number of farms and farmers in these states also affected the likelihood of a town's decline. Towns located in counties with larger than average declines in farms and smaller than average increases in the value of agricultural output were more likely than other towns to lose population. The national data showed that towns' likelihoods of experiencing population decline increased if they were already small in 1980, if they were located in farming-dependent or mining-dependent counties, and if they scored low on an amenity scale that summarized measures of climate and recreational opportunities.

Qualitative research has underscored additional problems in small rural communities. Residents complain of store and school closings and note the frequency with which young people move away. Contrary to Portes' observation that young people leave to escape stultifying social controls, the decisions residents and former residents describe nearly always focus on the lack of jobs in small towns. Educators and public officials report serious concerns about a rural brain drain that is stripping communities of talented young people capable of staffing schools and hospitals and promoting technological innovation. Some communities suffer from low morale and high rates of drug use among young people. Evidence also suggests resistance among native-born residents to immigrants, as well as low wages and dangerous working conditions among immigrants employed in meat processing plants and on farms (Wuthnow 2013).

Were this not enough, small towns have also experienced tornadoes, hurricanes, and floods, and some have been victimized by chemical spills, seepage of toxins into ground water, radioactivity contamination, and mining disasters. Media accounts have emphasized the difficulties in farming communities facing severe drought, problems from soil contamination, methane pollution, poverty, and runoff from feedlots. In qualitative research, town leaders mention additional problems, such as declining tax revenue, difficulties in maintaining roads and bridges, and cutbacks in law enforcement. Clergy discuss declining church memberships, church closings, and shortages of adequately trained pastors and priests. Residents reinforce perceptions of rural conservatism by expressing support for nativist and anti-gay

candidates and fiscally extreme rollbacks of government safety net programs.

On balance, the picture of small-town and rural America is not pretty. Population is sparse and declining, jobs are scarce, wages are low, schools are closing, shopping and services are farther away, and fine dining is nonexistent, as are cultural events other than band concerts and school plays. Although people still live in these communities, they are disproportionately older and are perhaps the ones who could not escape or have returned to live out their days where housing is cheap and life is simple. The studies that document these problems sometimes suggest that state and federal government should do more to help, or that residents should simply pick up and move on. The most likely scenario is one of continuing depopulation and economic decline.

Potential for Resilience

What then are the resources that small rural communities can draw on to avoid the worst? Close inspection of the data and the theoretical assumptions behind it, as well as observations from the field suggest at least four caveats to the usual gloom and doom scenarios presented in the media and in much of the academic literature.

First, the demographic story is not only a story of decline. Although declining population is the reality in many small rural communities, it is by no means common in all such communities, nor is it happening as quickly and dramatically as headlines about dying counties suggest. The key is to distinguish more clearly between absolute and relative decline and to specify more precisely where the most serious depopulation is occurring. In absolute terms, 14 million more people lived in rural areas in 2010 than in 1900. Population growth in rural areas has been far less than in urban areas, but the nation's overall population growth has contributed to the demographic stability of many rural communities. Although a majority of the smallest towns lost population between 1980 and 2010, relatively few of the people who lived in small towns lived in those smallest towns. Most lived in towns of at least 5,000 people and a majority of those towns remained stable or grew. When population does decline, the rate of decline must also be considered. Gradual decline is less disruptive

than sharp decline. Between 1980 and 2010, only 17 percent of small nonurban towns declined by more than 1 percent a year. In qualitative interviews, residents in towns that were gradually losing population frequently denied that decline was happening at all. Only when bright line events occurred, such as a plant closing or losing the school, did they express serious concerns about decline. Between 2000 and 2010, only about 50 small nonurban towns lost more than 50 percent of their residents. These were towns in which a natural disaster occurred or towns that had to be evacuated because of toxic waste contamination or some other human-made catastrophe.

Several other factors complicate drawing conclusions about decline from demographic statistics. One, as we have seen, is that many small nonurban towns benefit from locations and social institutions that inhibit population loss. Towns in warmer climates, close to recreational and tourist attractions, within easy commuting distance of larger towns and cities, near interstate highways, with colleges or community colleges, with county courthouses, and with balanced economic conditions that include services and manufacturing, government offices, and farming and mining are substantially protected against serious population loss. A related consideration is the crowding phenomenon that contributes to greater population decline among the smallest towns when there are a larger number of towns in the same county. Many of the smallest towns were established a century or more ago when trains needed to stop every 10 miles to take on coal and water, and when farm to market transportation was difficult. Many of those towns have been declining for a long time.

However, demographic decline should not be taken as an indication necessarily of economic decline. Increases in productivity through technological innovation and organizational efficiency must also be taken into account. Per capita GDP of the nine Middle West states mentioned before increased in relation to per capita GDP for the nation between 1969 and 2005. Agricultural economists argue that large-acreage family farms are more efficient than small family farms, and in interviews farmers generally agree. Another aspect of rural demography that must be taken into account is immigration. Eighty percent of small nonurban towns currently include some foreign-born residents. Besides the

continuing importance of seasonal low-wage labor on farms and in construction and inexpensive housing, the rise of packaged food processing and the relocation of slaughter houses and packing plants from cities to smaller towns, such as Liberal, Kansas, and Lexington, Nebraska, account for much of the influx of new immigrants. In sum, the demographic patterns in small towns and rural areas include not only decline but also stability and growth as well as institutional factors that inhibit dramatic decline and retain significant numbers of residents.

A second resource for resilience is social capital (Flora and Flora 2003). Durkheim's argument with Tönnies about this has perhaps left sociologists on Durkheim's side (Aldous 1972). In Durkheim's view, *gemeinschaft* was too homogeneous and too lacking in diversified economic relationships to be viable. But Durkheim's depiction fit the premodern tribal groups that interested him better than the late nineteenth-century rural communities that interested Tönnies. None of the ethnographic studies of small communities suggest that social differentiation in these communities is absent. Standard indices of income heterogeneity are as high as in metropolitan areas, and indices of racial and ethnic heterogeneity are nearly as high (Wuthnow 2013). Still, there is truth in observations that social relationships are different in small places than in large places. Residents of small towns argue that they know everyone and that everyone is the same. The issue then becomes how to best interpret these claims.

When small-town residents say they know everyone in the community that does not imply that they actually know everyone or that they live inside a closed network. In a town of only 1,000 residents, it is unlikely that everyone knows everyone else. When asked about this in interviews, these residents acknowledge that they do not actually know everyone. It is rather the familiarity and the reality that they could easily find out who someone is if they want to that these residents have in mind, and value. Gossip reinforces the notion that networks are closed even though they are not. A person walking to the post office whose neighbor says, "I hear your aunt is in the hospital" realizes that the neighbor is connected to the aunt or to someone who knows the aunt. Encounters of this kind tell people they live in a neighborly town where people care about one another, but they do not imply that

networks are closed or that relationships are so controlling that any freedom-minded young person would flee at the first opportunity. In fact, residents report not only that they like having good neighbors, but also that they appreciate the privacy they enjoy there. Houses are farther apart. Neighbors do not live in the same building. A person who wants solitude can easily find it in the open spaces that surround the town.

The informal social networks that residents report include extra-local as well as local ties. Although they may have family in town and know the teachers and shopkeepers through church and club activities, they typically have close relatives who live elsewhere, keep in contact with friends through phone calls and email, and travel to other communities to shop, see the doctor, and conduct business. It is true that people say they live where they do because of having grown up there, or have chosen their line of work because of a local family connection or teacher, but it is also the case that people in small towns talk about jobs attained through an uncle who lives in another state or a former college roommate. If anything, geographically dispersed social networks have become easier and more common as a result of information technology.

The formal social capital through membership and participation in voluntary organizations that has been of interest in the literature on civic engagement is relatively robust in small rural communities, even though it has been affected by the same trends documented in national studies. Data on nonprofit associations demonstrate that there are significantly more of these organizations per capita in small towns than in cities. That does not imply that participation rates are any higher, but some evidence suggests that it may be and that measures of trust, which usually correlate highly with participation, are higher. Another interesting pattern is that upscale residents in small towns are more likely to be involved in civic organizations than their counterparts in larger communities. Qualitative evidence suggests that local norms about equality and everyone doing their part are a reason for these higher levels of participation (Wuthnow 2013).

Another point about social capital is reminiscent of Tönnies' argument that places and attachments to places matter. Suzanne Keller's (2003) work emphasizes turf and territory as one of the principal building blocks of community. Except for occasional

acknowledgment of proximity as a variable, social network studies largely ignore the role of place, but in qualitative interviews residents of small communities nearly always talk about place as one of the most significant aspects of their communities. They do not always talk about it favorably; they wish the climate was better or they were closer to a city. It is the familiarity of the place that they like, almost viscerally, and that makes the community feel like home. This attachment to places is a powerful resource for small communities. It reinforces loyalties that facilitate community involvement. It does not imply that people stay in the same town, but is consistent with evidence that state-to-state migration is declining (Kaplan and Schulhofer-Wohl 2013).

In the sociological literature, network ties become social capital when they are used to attain goals. The goals commonly considered are getting jobs, conducting business, helping children achieve in school, and attaining status. Residents of small towns show that these are not the only goals people care about. They also consider it important to be happy. They associate happiness with being around people they know and love, with avoiding the hassles of traffic and the disturbances of noise, with pursuing a balanced life that includes not only making money but also having time for other things. The point is not that small-town residents are any more interested in these goals than people who live elsewhere, but rather that they consider the social capital they have in small towns a resource that helps them pursue these goals.

A third resource consists of schools and other training centers and includes the various publicly funded service organizations that range from government offices, to hospitals and medical clinics, to farm service agencies. The problems facing small-town and rural schools are well-documented: schools close, students are bused to larger towns, and small class sizes make it impossible to offer advanced placement courses and to field a full array of athletic and musical opportunities. Children who grow up in small communities may limit their horizons because they lack role models and feel incapable of navigating successfully in large universities and cities. Those who do succeed contribute to the brain drain by heading elsewhere for better job opportunities. With these problems, it is difficult to imagine that anything good can be said about the educational institutions in small rural communities. The

predominantly rural Midwestern states that were known as the “education belt” early in the twentieth century surely have little going for them now.

And yet, a recent report on educational attainment among young adults included a surprising result. The states with the highest percentage of adults ages 25 to 34 who were college graduates were Massachusetts and North Dakota. North Dakota was one of the states that critics said was suffering from serious brain drain. There was no question that young adults with college degrees were leaving the state, but enough were staying that the state had one of the highest levels of educational attainment in the nation. Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and South Dakota also had above average percentages of young adults with college degrees (Chronicle of Higher Education 2010). States with higher than average percentages of citizens with high school diplomas included Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Reasons for high levels of secondary schooling in these states included a history of investing in well-administrated county school systems, public funding from property taxes on farmland, and low high school dropout rates.

But many of the schools in small towns did not have to deal with low incomes, unemployment, discrimination, and segregation that schools in inner city areas faced. These were towns with relatively homogeneous populations. Towns with ethnically mixed populations caused by recent immigration typically did less well in meeting the challenges of expanding demands on school facilities. Among college-educated residents of small towns, there was significant underemployment, especially for women who found jobs available only in low-paying office work. The reason states such as Kansas and Minnesota were able to retain as many college-educated young adults as they did was that population within these states was being redistributed from rural areas to counties in the vicinity of Kansas City, Minneapolis, and St. Paul.

The growth that has occurred near these cities and in the vicinity of Bentonville, Des Moines, Fargo, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Saint Louis, Sioux Falls, and Tulsa complicates the story of heartland decline. People in these places still consider themselves part of the heartland. They contribute to the tax base of heartland states, generate their share of wealthy elites, and work at

companies that specialize in biotechnology, financial advising, food processing, pharmaceuticals, satellite guidance systems, and transportation. It may be, as Thomas Frank observed, that a person can drive through empty parking lots and past closed warehouses and manufacturing facilities in Wichita and conclude that the heartland has seen better days. But to do that misses the important growth that has occurred in most heartland cities.

Publicly funded service organizations include hospitals, clinics, assisted living facilities, family assistance programs, and farm agencies supported through state and federal taxes, as well as local government offices that record deeds, collect taxes, and administer law enforcement (Brown and Schafft 2011). The extent to which these organizations and agencies can be considered a resource for social resilience is complicated. Tea Party demands for fiscal conservatism and to reduce the size of government have curbed the capacity of these organizations. But small towns and rural areas benefit significantly from farm subsidies, Social Security, and other transfer payments. Communities such as Minot, North Dakota, and Fort Riley, Kansas, benefit from military installations. Sparsely populated states benefit from earmarks and states with elected officials who gain seniority through single-party dominance may be in an especially strong position to receive such benefits.

A final resource for resilience is leadership. The conditions that shape population trends such as location near cities and interstate highways or climate and recreational amenities are matters of structure. But within those constraints, agency matters as well. Interviews reveal numerous ways in which the activities of local leaders provide resources to their communities. One is applying for state and federal grants. Another is participating in multi-county and regional commissions engaged in planning and economic development. These are the commissions that influence the location of businesses, ethanol plants, roads, wind energy farms, wireless providers, and military posts.

At the county, township, and municipal level, community leaders talk in interviews about tax incentives, bond offerings, and free land to attract new businesses and residents. They describe legal maneuvers to secure the cleanup of toxic waste dumps and to protect family farms from corporate takeovers. A town that secures a new hospital or that constructs a new firehouse or community

center is in a better position to retain residents, they find, than a neighboring town that does not provide these facilities. Town leaders describe efforts to keep the local grocery store open, to ensure that farmers receive loans to purchase equipment, to repave Main Street, and to raze decaying buildings that give the town a bad image.

Some projects are ill-conceived from the start. Townspeople talk of grand ideas for bringing in a large manufacturing plant or attracting tourists with better advertising. Community leaders express frustration about the red tape required to secure government funding. Elected officials sometimes depend more on personal networks and patronage than on performance to stay in office. Town managers whose jobs depend on performance and who are often better educated and have wider contacts seem to do better at overcoming these limitations.

That brings us, finally, to the question of politics and whether the political conservatism popularly connected with the heartland is a weakness or a resource. Its potential drawbacks have been widely discussed. A state that requires evolution to be taught as only a theory alongside a theory about divine origins is said to be one in which children cannot possibly go on to college and expect to succeed. A state like that cannot expect to attract companies that need well-educated employees. A state dominated by fundamentalist preachers and ultraconservative elected officials damages itself, critics argue, by not respecting the rights of unions, keeping wages low, gutting the social safety net, losing federal health insurance assistance, and presenting a hostile environment for companies that want to provide domestic partner benefits or insurance coverage that includes birth control. Instances can be found in which these criticisms appear to be well-founded, but it is difficult to determine if different policies would produce different results. The difficulties are compounded when arguments about growth and decline are used to justify particular policies. For example, the governor of a state in which the population is declining might use that decline as an argument for reducing taxes in hopes of attracting new businesses, but if the decline has been happening for half a century and has little to do with tax rates, and if the proposed reductions hurt the poor and benefit the rich, critics would do well to challenge the governor's arguments.

The related question about conservative politics is whether citizens are duped by appeals based on moral issues to vote in ways contrary to their economic interests. Although that possibility exists, caution is warranted for several reasons. One is that conservative moral issues and fiscal policies need not go together, even though they may seem to during particular elections. Bartels' (2005) criticism of Frank (2004), for example, demonstrated that white working-class voters were not swayed by moral and religious appeals that trumped economic considerations. A second reason is that moral politics may carry more weight in some instances, not only because of aggressive advocacy groups, but also because they give people a sense of control over their lives, whereas the economic policies that might help them are too uncertain and too remote to be believable. In that respect, a fundamentalist church that tells its members what is right and wrong and helps them keep their families together is likely to be more appealing than a politician they do not know who says that some program in Washington, DC will improve the economy.

One other reason to be cautious about arguments accusing people of being duped brings us back to the legacy of sociological theory. If people in small rural communities are the backwater of modern history, viewed as people left behind by the great progressive developments of modernization, then it is easier to imagine that they are not smart enough to understand what they are doing or why they are doing it. It then becomes the role of enlightened social scientists to show them the error of their ways. That is quite different from another role of public sociology, which seeks first to gain an empathic understanding of the subject matter under consideration.

Conclusion

Sociologists' emphasis on urbanization has left a gap in empirical research on smaller out-of-the-way communities that has only recently begun to be filled. Although much of the recent research focuses on small-town and rural decline, closer inspection of the evidence suggests considerable diversity in the experiences and trajectories of different communities. Population decline and sparse job opportunities in many of the nation's smallest communities are only part of the story. A majority of the

nonmetropolitan population lives in towns of at least 5,000 residents, and a majority of these towns are not declining. Qualitative evidence demonstrates that people who live in small nonurban communities value the amenities and lifestyles available in these locations.

The wholesome values that pundits associate with small-town heartland America should not be exaggerated, but they should not be dismissed either. Living in places that are familiar, easy to navigate, and close to family and friends are values that people who live in small communities appreciate. It makes no sense to them that people in cities would choose to live in crowded spaces amid noisy and congested traffic. Many small-town residents prefer a balanced life that includes more time for family and friends, even if that involves less lucrative jobs. Mass media, email, and travel readily connect them with the wider world.

Community resilience is a topic of growing interest. Resilience cannot be understood simply in terms of population stability and growth. It implies access to sufficient resources, including schools, businesses, government agencies, and social services. Those do not have to be strictly local, although proximity is desirable. Resilience implies intangible resources as well, such as civic participation and supportive social networks. In this respect, investigations of small heartland communities offer possibilities not only to understand American society, but also to advance sociological theory. Assumptions about linear modernization that saw inevitable decline of rural areas in favor of urban locations need to be questioned. Contemporary social relations are decidedly diverse. Diversity typically implies paying attention to racial and ethnic differences, gender, and social class. It should also include investigations of the location, size, and diverse cultures of local communities.

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NARRATIVES, RELIGION, AND TRAUMATIC LIFE EVENTS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the growing sociological interest in resilience by using a virtue ethics framework to examine distinct ways young adults respond to stressful life events. Based on interviews with 26 young adults in nine U.S. states, I argue that resilience differs from coping. Coping implies people have mitigated the negative effects of a traumatic event. I define resilience as a dynamic process oriented toward a telos that encompasses both personal wellbeing and contribution to the common good. Although we know that strong interpersonal, community and spiritual ties support resilience, many of the young adults I interviewed had few strong social connections of any kind. Few of the 26 young adults I interviewed were religious in traditional ways. Those few young adults who attended services weekly and received social support from their religious congregations experienced high levels of wellbeing despite experiencing many hardships. Even among those who are not religious in traditional ways, nearly all of them ask moral questions about meaning and purpose. Studies of resilience should thus consider both

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individual and social factors that lead to or inhibit experiencing growth after a traumatic event.

Introduction

Why are some people resilient in the face of hardships, but others fall into chronic dysfunction? Is coping with hardship the same as resilience? How do religious beliefs, practices, and narratives influence resilience among young adults who have had traumatic life experiences? To understand these questions, I interviewed 26 young adults in nine different states. All of them had undergone traumatic life events, but the following three narratives demonstrate the diverse paths people follow in the wake of hardships. Laura's narrative is one of ongoing suffering and chronic dysfunction. Alex has overcome many hardships, but still lacks a clear path toward socioeconomic and personal stability. James is not only personally successful, but also gives back to his community in various ways. Although much research focuses on how people mitigate the negative effects of traumatic events, these three narratives illustrate how experiencing traumatic events leads people to reflect on larger goals, purpose, and meaning. These narratives also illustrate how social contexts and relationships that can alleviate or magnify the effects of stressful events. I argue that we must first distinguish between mitigating the negative effects of stress, understood as coping with hardship, and resilience, understood as a process that entails purposeful motion toward a goal. Understanding resilience as a process then leads us beyond isolating how particular religious beliefs or behaviors affect responses to stress. I focus on narratives through which people understand their trauma and define a sense of meaning and purpose.

Narrative Summaries

Laura: White, 26, from the South. She hopes there is a finish line to her pain.

Laura's life story is a long narrative of pain. She was bullied for being obese as a child, became pregnant at age 15, and dropped out of high school. Laura's baby brought her happiness she had never known. One day at work, she received a phone call telling

her to rush home. Her baby had walked into the backyard of her house and fallen into a small pond. When Laura reached home, police and paramedics had surrounded her house and her baby was clinging to life. Laura prayed incessantly to God to save her baby's life, even if her baby would end up brain-damaged. When her baby died a few hours later, even the doctors cried and asked, "Why?" Laura said, "I felt like I was left in the dark, like there's no light at the end of the tunnel."¹ As she told me this story, I shivered. Laura experienced darkness so profound that most people would hope and pray to never end up in her situation.

Laura never had close relationships growing up, and her baby's death tore even deeper into her weak relationships with her mom, dad, brother, and the baby's father. When I met her five years after her baby's death, Laura had two more children, one with the father of her first child and one with another man. Although her deceased baby's father started abusing drugs and alcohol, and abuses Laura emotionally, physically, and sexually, she still lives with him. She fears him most of the time, so she practices Wicca to try to expel the demons in his soul demons that speak to her while he sleeps. Laura definitely believes in some kind of higher power, but the problem is that he is not "100 percent there." In some situations, such as when Laura's boyfriend took her with him to get drugs, Laura asked God to keep her safe, and he protected her. But when her baby was dying, God did not show up to help her. Laura's memory of God abandoning her at her darkest moment continues to haunt her.

To ease her emotional pain, to calm her nerves, and to not cry all day, Laura used to smoke marijuana two or three times daily. Since being arrested for drug possession, however, she has stopped smoking marijuana. Instead, Laura began taking four mental health medications to calm her nerves, balance out her moods, and simply enable her to function. When I met her at a coffee shop in the South, her voice was quiet, her diction slurred, and her eyes glassed over. "She's not all there," I scribbled in my notes. I could feel in my body that Laura's pain was so deep and her medication so heavy that her full self was buried somewhere.

¹ Quotation marks indicate direct quotations from interview transcripts.

Laura works full-time at a low-wage job. Her hopes focus on taking care of her two children. "I'm stuck," Laura said. But she believes that she can help her children avoid the same pain she experiences. Sometimes when her children see her crying, they ask, "Mommy, you okay?" Her voice shook when she looked at me and told me that she replies, "Mommy loves you forever no matter what." For the sake of her kids, Laura wants to "get on track and do good." She prays there will be a finish line to her pain. After the interview was over, I leaned over, hugged tightly Laura's small frame, and blabbered five times, "I'm so sorry for your pain. I really hope there is a finish line soon."

Alex: 25, African-American, from the South. His mother wishes he were dead.

Alex, who I met at a Starbucks in another small town in the South, started off our interview eagerly telling me about his great love for his girlfriend and his faith in God. But his optimism for his future was punctuated by stories of past drug use that led him to overdose twice. Alex also has an extensive criminal record. Starting at age 10, he was diagnosed with a long list of mental illnesses, including ADD, ADHD, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. He lamented his lack of a "sturdy foundation" at home as the reason he became a "hell-raiser." Alex never knew the identity of his father. He adores his grandmother, but stole from her to support his drug habit. He has always lived with his brother, but since Alex chased him around the yard and tried to stab him with a butcher's knife, his brother will not speak to him.

The love Alex feels from God, his girlfriend, and his grandmother contrasted with everyone else he spoke about, especially his mother. His mother told him so frequently that she wished he were dead that one day Alex went to his friend's house, got "one of his 38 specials," took out the ammunition and returned home. Standing in the kitchen in front of his mother, Alex put the gun to his head and threatened to commit suicide. His mother said she would be so happy if he killed himself that she would throw a party and serve cake to all who came. Alex put the gun down, but he knows his mother really does wish that he were dead. I sank in my seat as Alex's speech slowed and his eyes wandered up to the

ceiling as he pondered his painful relationship with his mother, exemplified by her urging him to commit suicide.

After about 10 years of heavy substance abuse and constant trouble with the police, Alex reached a turning point when his friend overdosed from heroin and died in his arms. Alex is now substance-free; he even stopped taking mental health medications and pain pills. He has not experienced his previous symptoms of bipolar disorder or schizophrenia despite stopping medications. Alex's goals are to go to community college, earn a degree, get a stable job, marry his girlfriend, and raise a family that could be proud of him. Alex actively seeks good people to guide him, such as his girlfriend and his pastor, and has turned away from a troubled lifestyle to a more normal one. But what will his life look like in the future? Will his desires become a reality?

Alex feels lucky because he is not "in the ground or locked away somewhere for the rest of my life." Alex also had recently returned to the Baptist faith of his childhood. He firmly believes that God will turn his life around, but things are moving slowly. Real change will only come in God's time, he said. Alex sees small signs that God is working in his life, like when his friend's little sister one day simply looked at him and told him everything will be okay. Alex knows he just needs to be patient, build strong relationships, and stay out of drugs and out of trouble. He can see the path to follow.

But Alex's narrative illustrates how even the path to resilience is not always a straight line. Alex said he quit all substances, but then he admitted that he and a friend drank a case of beer the night before I met him. When he arrived to meet me, he was eager to describe his high hopes for his future, but his bloodshot eyes were a haunting reminder of his past. Alex knows that getting a good job and getting married will provide him the stability he lacked in his own childhood, but his past criminal record may be an obstacle to getting a good job and his relationship has yet to stand the test of time.

James: 27, White, from the West. He wears his disabilities like a badge of honor.

How does someone who could not read until age 14 become a "book nerd"? How does someone with Asperger's syndrome

become a millionaire philanthropist by age 27? When I met James in a large independent bookstore in a booming metropolitan city out West, I recalled the saying that there is more to a book than its cover. James looks like a typical book browser. He is about six-foot-one, wears glasses, and met me wearing jeans and a sweatshirt. James was so clearly bright, successful, and confident that I wondered how he ended up in my sample of people with traumatic life events. I interrupted his cheerful narrative to ask about his childhood. He then revealed a long struggle with dyslexia, depression, bullying, social isolation, and even coming close to death at age 14.

There are three key relationships in James's life that helped him move forward. First is his mother, whom he described as a "helicopter parent mom" who never gave up on him. When others thought he was stupid and could not learn, she kept looking for better tutors. When he nearly died from a disease that inflamed all his organs, his brother and father avoided him like the plague, but his mother nursed him back from near death. Second is his high school science teacher. James attended a \$40,000-a-year prep school that sends most of its graduates to elite colleges. Although many of his peers bullied and made fun of him, his high school science teacher invited him to her house and taught him chemistry by teaching hands-on learning through cooking and baking. Tears welled up in his eyes as he said, "She changed my life!" Third is a Tibetan Buddhist teacher James met during college who taught him how to deal with his anger. At college, James was finally doing well academically, but still struggled socially. With the help of his Buddhist teacher, James forgave his emotionally distant father. He found peace with his dyslexic brain and unique way of socializing. James's personality and intelligence may not make sense to others, but now he wears his disabilities "like a badge of honor." He still struggles to make close friends, but he no longer feels hostility toward those who reject him. He also now has a group of friends—most of whom also have autism or Asperger's syndrome—who understand and appreciate him.

James was raised nominally Christian, but when he nearly died at age 14, he questioned how a good God could let him suffer so much. James rejected simplistic explanations people gave him, such as "God works in mysterious ways." James was angry with

God, but didn't give up his belief in a higher power. A friend's father, a Jewish Rabbi, encouraged James to explore his anger with God. James's mother encouraged him to read books on every world religion. But it was the personal relationship with his Buddhist teacher, their long talks about his painful experiences, and being trained to meditate with others or alone in the mountains that transformed James. He continues to read about different spiritual masters, but he is clear that he's looking for "wisdom" on how to lead a good life rather than worshiping anyone. Because of his various mix of beliefs, James considers himself a "secular humanist Buddhist." He takes his Buddhist practice very seriously—meditating every day for an hour. His strong mentoring and close relationship with his Buddhist teacher allowed James him to stop taking depression medication and slowly but surely develop better friendships. His daily meditation keeps him on the right path.

James learned to use his dyslexia to analyze data for companies and advise them on how to invest. He has been so successful in investments that his net worth at the time was \$2.5 million dollars. Even though he could have made even more money, he turned down several projects from companies that were not environmentally or community friendly. James lives in a simple apartment with a roommate and hardly spends money on himself. The previous year he earned \$100,000 and gave \$22,000 to community organizations that help youth facing the same types of hardships that he did. Looking to the future, James would like to get married, but finds it difficult to develop close relationships with women. He dated one woman seriously, but after she moved her interest in him waned. Despite his lack of romantic relationships, James is extremely proud of the long journey he has made. "I've gone from the outsider to the one in the middle of things that everyone thinks is something else," he said. James feels a strong sense of duty to help others through his ideas and through financial investments. "With great powers comes great responsibility," he explained. His life goal is to pay back three of four times the blessings he has received.

Narratives and Resilience

Laura, Alex, and James were three of 26 young adults that I interviewed for this study. Before presenting more interview

narratives, I will argue that seeing humans as purpose-oriented moves beyond asking questions about coping or recovery and leads us to ask about resilience, understood as purposeful action toward a *telos*. In part due to the influence of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, the concept of *telos* is slowly making its way back into American sociology. For Aristotle, personal virtue was closely linked to a virtuous society. But understanding how such virtuous communities emerge and flourish has not been a central concern of sociologists, who more often examine society through a functionalist or a utilitarian lens (Gorski 2012; Smith 2003, 2010).

Incorporating insights from virtue ethics provides powerful analytical tools to examine the relationship between personal good and the common good (Mooney 2014). In *After Virtue*, moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre critiques much social theory for its lack of attention to human purpose or excellence. He argues that institutions or communities are more than a means through which individuals pursue “their own self-chosen conception of the good life” (MacIntyre 2007 [1981]:195). For MacIntyre, relationships and communities are not a utilitarian means to achieve individual goods, nor do relationships and communities simply establish rules for people to follow. Rather, relationships and communities both define the goods of excellence people seek and also provide the contexts and practices to sustain virtues.

MacIntyre further argues that social science cannot describe social facts or individual behaviors apart from some concept of the motivations behind those behaviors and the specific settings—both institutions and practices—where human behavior occurs. Understanding human motivations requires identifying a *telos* of a human life as told through narratives. It is only with regard to a *telos* that we can understand narratives and evaluate the purpose of a life, as well as the progress, or lack thereof, toward that purpose (MacIntyre 2007 [1981]:215-216).

Narratives are a powerful way to understand how stressful events are experienced. Narratives allow us to see not only momentary actions, but also to explore how actions are linked across time. In addition, narratives reveal which aspects of the cultural or social context become meaningful in a particular person’s story. The narratives I present illustrate that relationships are key to resilience—no one gets unstuck alone. But relationships

that are embedded in religious practices and communities that link personal narratives to larger narratives are particularly powerful at promoting resilience, understood as purposeful action toward a *telos*.

Resilience and Personal Growth

The growing interest in adult resilience is part of a broader shift in psychology from the disease model of health, which focuses on preventing bad outcomes, to the growth model of health, which focuses on promoting good health outcomes, even after stressful or traumatic events. Psychologists Zautra, Hall, and Murray define resilience as “successful adaptation to adversity” (2010:4). They further distinguish between recovery, or bouncing back from hardship, and sustainability, which requires “continuing forward in the face of hardship” (Zautra, Hall, and Murray 2010:4). Recently, psychologists have begun to examine cases where personal growth occurs after trauma (Bonanno 2009; Calhoun and Tedeschi 2013; Seilgman 2011).

George Bonanno (2009) argues that chronic dysfunction, understood as prolonged suffering and an inability to function that endures for several years, is less common than assumed. The reason chronic dysfunction is not as common as often assumed is that adversity can cause people to develop new capacities that they would not have otherwise. Similarly, Zautra, Hall, and Murray write, “when people reach and go beyond their capacities to cope with events, we observe not simply a change in levels of cognition, affect, and behavior, but also a change in the nature of relationships among these core elements of the human response” (2010:6). We need to look not only at how responses to adversity affect one element of the person—such as his or her emotions—but also at how adversity influences the relationship between various parts of the person, such as the relationship between emotions and behavior. Events that cause stress or challenge a person or community’s capacity to respond can influence their goals. In response to risk exposure and adversity, people can set new goals and develop new capacities. Understanding resilience requires not just focusing on coping strategies that mitigate risk or solve problems, but also enabling people to reach their highest capacities, even if they have been exposed to risk or harm.

Is resilience just another psychological character trait that some people have and others do not? It would be tempting to define resilient people as psychological super-heroes with strong wills or amazing emotional control who can seemingly deal with any problem. But research in cognitive neuroscience (Fredrickson 2013) has shown that even very small acts, such as smiling at someone or saying a kind word, can produce cognitive and emotional benefits. Hence, I agree with Zautra, Hall and Murray that “it is important not to overstate the amount of psychological muscle it might take to be resilient. Resilient actions often start just with a smile or a moment for reflection that welcomes a broader perspective and encourages a thoughtful optimism about events” (2010:10).

Many studies of stressful life events focus on a particular outcome, such as socioeconomic achievement or psychological wellbeing. Rather than focusing on particular outcomes, Zautra, Hall, and Murray argue that we need to understand resilience as a process. Sustainability requires making plans and choices. First, it is important to distinguish recovery from a stressful event from sustainability, as sustainability entails purpose-oriented, forward motion toward a goal. Hence, I define resilience as purpose-oriented, sustained movement toward a goal following stressful life events. Understanding resilience asks how people define meaning and purpose in life while examining their behaviors in relation to those goals.

Resilience and the Social Context

Looking at resilience as a process also requires examining how it is influenced by social context, including the religious context. A few sociologists have contributed to understanding contextual factors that influence resilience. In both *Children of the Great Depression* (1974) and *Children of the Land* (2000), Glen Elder combines history, psychology, and sociology to examine individual variation within communities affected by similar changes, namely the Great Depression of the 1930s and the decline of the rural farming economy in the 1980s. Although both studies focus on socioeconomic change as the primary risk factor to wellbeing, Elder’s understanding of successful adaptation to risk includes outcomes such as positive values, strong families, and investment

in community institutions. Elder further challenges the common idea that socioeconomic risk early in life always leads to bad outcomes and that socioeconomic advantage early in life always leads to good outcomes: “*Life trajectories are by no means solely determined by socioeconomic disadvantage and subsequent misfortune*” (Elder and Conger 2000:230). In Elder and Conger’s study, a large number of young people from disadvantaged circumstances ended up doing better than one would have predicted based on their backgrounds (2000:230). Elder and Conger also find that either due to lack of motivation or because of risky behaviors, people can lose the advantages they are born into. Family relationships, community resources, and religious communities are all key factors in overcoming disadvantage. Elder’s work hence defines risk as residing in macro-level circumstances, and he calls our attention to the closest relationships people have in family, community, and religious institutions as the primary sources of resilience. In particular, he finds that lives characterized by “strong bonds across the generations, a community investment in church, school, and civic groups, and a culture of industry, civic responsibility, and care for secondary schools” contribute to overcoming socioeconomic disadvantage (Elder and Conger 2000:249).

Robert Wuthnow’s (2014) work on social resilience in rural America echoes many of Elder’s findings. Over time, macro-structural changes such as the decline of the rural economy, which is related to population declines in many rural areas, have changed the landscape of rural America. However, Wuthnow argues that the story of rural America is neither linear nor uniform. Some communities experienced decline, but then bounced back. Wuthnow defines resilience as comprising economic resources such as schools, but also intangible goods such as social networks and civic engagement. Importantly, Wuthnow points out that leaders who have foresight about what their communities need and who build strong personal relationships with their community members are key to igniting economic revival. Compared to urban areas, in rural areas, such close relationships are buffered by proximity, time spent together, and participation in religious and community organizations, thereby often enabling resilience.

Hall and Lamont use the term social resilience “to denote an outcome in which the members of a group sustain their well-being in the face of challenges to it” (Hall and Lamont 2013:13). Echoing the move in psychology away from the disease model and toward a holistic view of wellbeing, Hall and Lamont define wellbeing as having various dimensions, including physical and psychological health, economic stability, and recognition of one’s identity in a particular community.

Elder, Wuthnow, Hall, and Lamont all concur on the importance of community institutions to resilience. In particular, Elder and Wuthnow point to strong impacts of religious communities on resilience, especially in low-income and rural areas. Although young adults today may maintain some type of personal belief system, few are active in religious congregations. According to the General Social Survey (GSS), only 5.1 percent of the U.S. population claimed no religious preference in 1972, and only 16.5 percent did by 2010. In his review of data from the GSS and the National Congregations Study, Mark Chaves concludes that even if church attendance has remained steadily at about one-third of the U.S. population since the 1970s, nearly every other indicator of traditional religious beliefs has declined (2012). Previous work using the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) found similarly low levels of formal religious involvement and weak denominational affiliation alongside diverse types of private practice (Smith 2011; Smith and Denton 2005; Smith and Snell 2009).

Resilience, Coping, and Chronic Dysfunction

Table 1 provides a heuristic tool to understand the process of resilience. First, understanding resilience requires examining how the intentions and actions of a particular moment do or do not contribute to a unity of life oriented toward a particular purpose or intention. Only with regard to a *telos* can we understand narratives and evaluate the purpose of a life, as well as the progress or lack thereof toward that purpose. The concept of *telos* allows us to distinguish two processes that are often conflated: resilience and coping. Coping implies stasis, a state of standing still, rather than forward motion. In addition, the very language of coping implies a vision of the person solving practical problems as they arise in the

moment. However, this pragmatist approach to responses to stress excludes how people reflect on higher purposes and define ultimate concerns. By defining resilience as a *telos*, we can also see how chronic dysfunction occurs in cases where ongoing suffering prevents forward motion.

Table 1. Resilience, Coping, and Chronic Dysfunction

	Resilience	Coping	Chronic Dysfunction
<i>Telos</i>	Forward motion	Stasis	Ongoing negative effects of suffering
PERMA	High on all	High on some	Low on all
Virtue Ethics	Coherent values and actions	Articulate values but inconsistent actions	Incoherent values and actions
Common Good	Socially engaged and generous	Uninvolved socially and distant from others	Isolated and/or addicted to legal or illegal substances

Second, positive psychologist Martin Seligman argues that authentic wellbeing is a multidimensional construct with given constitutive elements that cannot be reduced to one another: positive emotions, engagement, strong relationships, meaning, and achievement, or PERMA (Seligman 2011:16–20). Although Seligman revised his earlier theory of wellbeing to include relationships, most empirical work from positive psychology still focuses on individuals or small groups, not communities or larger groups. Hence, rather than assigning personal wellbeing to one single construct—such as positive emotions or life satisfaction—Seligman’s PERMA construct calls our attention to five separate dimensions of wellbeing that should each be analyzed separately. Persons can be high on all, high on some, or low on all aspects of PERMA.

Third, a virtue ethics framework urges us to examine both behaviors and motivations. Resilience requires coherence between values and actions. Some people may have articulate values but inconsistent actions, and others may struggle to articulate purposeful goals. Fourth, many accounts of wellbeing focus on individual goods, overlooking that the Aristotelian concept of *telos* points our attention to the interdependence of the personal good

and the common good. Resilient people view their personal good as interdependent with the good of others, including not just relatives but also their wider communities. Some people may have a few close relationships but little engagement outside of their immediate family or friendships. Finally, others may be socially isolated or addicted to legal or illegal substances, thereby making no contributions to the common good, and possibly harming the common good.

Table 1 can help us understand the narratives of Laura, Alex, and James. Laura is a case of chronic dysfunction. In her own words, Laura is “stuck.” The high point of her life was when her baby was born. At that time, she and the baby’s father had good jobs and numerous happy moments. Since her baby’s death, her life has spiraled downward. She does not trust anyone, not even family members or her inner circle of friends. Her relationship with her boyfriend is abusive. She repeatedly named him as an obstacle to her own growth. Laura lives largely moment to moment, trying to survive. She has little vision of a long-term plan to move forward. She is socially isolated. She used to be dependent on marijuana to get through the day; now she takes four prescribed mental health medications. Laura is low on all the elements of PERMA. However, she is employed and feels valued at work. Her hopes for progress lie in becoming more successful at work.

Alex is coping. For the first time in more than a decade, his life has reached equilibrium. He has recovered from mental illness and left behind most drugs and alcohol. He has regular daily habits, such as reading the Bible, and has a close relationship with his girlfriend whom he talks to every day. Alex’s major obstacles toward progress are education and work. He has had odd jobs on and off but has not been steadily employed in several years. He hopes to begin studying at the local community college and get a job. Alex has articulated goals, but his behaviors are inconsistent. He started going back to church, but does not necessarily go every week. He has quit most drugs and drinking, but admitted that he drank with a friend who showed up with a case of beer the night before I met him. Alex is high on some, but not all, elements of PERMA. He experiences many positive emotions, and has a strong sense of meaning grounded in his faith. But Alex is notably low on

the achievement dimension of PERMA. He has lacked stability in relationships, and is seeking to repair that.

James is resilient. He went through emotional, physical and spiritual recovery during college and is now thriving. His relationship with his mother was always strong. Recently, his relationships with his father and brother have improved—he has forgiven them for hurting him and spends more time with them. James has an articulate set of values that guide his choices about work. He has a close group of friends and daily habits of meditation that sustain his psychological wellbeing. His greatest goal in life is to give back to others, and he gives a large part of his income and much of his time to help others through various community organizations. James is high on all levels of PERMA. Even so, he hopes to develop even stronger personal relationships in the future, especially a romantic relationship with a woman.

Methods

Interviewee Selection and Characteristics

Because I was interested in understanding the variety of ways that religion influences resilience, I analyzed survey data from the NSYR and interviewed 26 youth who reported high levels of hardship and varying levels of resilience. NSYR was designed as a nationally representative sample of 3,370 youth who were recruited via a random-digit-dialing telephone survey method. The first survey was conducted in 2002, when youth were ages 13 to 17. The initial survey asked extensive questions about friendships, social behaviors, religious beliefs, and relationships with parents. The demographic characteristics of NSYR respondents are similar to other major surveys of adolescents in the U.S., such as Monitoring the Future, the National Household Education Survey, and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Because teenage years are a time of many transitions, NSYR conducted a second round of phone interviews when the youth were ages 16 to 21, and a third round when they were ages 18 to 23. Following each telephone survey, NSYR researchers selected a few hundred youth for in-person interviews as well. A fourth and

final wave of follow-up surveys of all respondents began in January 2013, when the respondents were in their mid to late 20s.²

In July 2013, the research team obtained a preliminary dataset of 1,800 respondents to the fourth wave of NSYR. Our goal was to identify people who had experienced traumatic events, and identify some who seemed resilient and some who did not, and then interview them in person. We used the fourth-wave NSYR survey instrument questions on stressful life events (3 indicators), and two measures of resilience: psychological wellbeing (14 indicators) and altruistic behavior (3 indicators).³ Because NSYR is a national sample of young adults, I was able to interview young adults from various religious backgrounds, beliefs, and practices.

As personal religious beliefs and practices are influenced by one's social context, I chose to interview young adults in three regions—the South, the Northeast, and the West—which vary in terms of the dominant religious culture. I contacted 30 people, of and 26 agreed to be interviewed. I traveled to nine different states to meet each interviewee in his or her hometown. In order to protect the confidentiality of the respondents, I cannot disclose the exact locations of the interviews. Most respondents replied to my first attempt to contact them. I called, emailed, and/or texted up to a total of four times before I stopped contact attempts. Of those who agreed to be interviewed, all of them completed their interviews. I paid each respondent \$110 for his or her time. In a few instances, when the respondent agreed to the interview but hesitated to confirm a specific date, I increased the amount to \$125.

NSYR data provided detailed information on the religious lives of the young adults. Because I wanted to interview youth from a variety of religious backgrounds and levels of practice, I did not choose interviewees based on how religious they were. However, during each interview I had a contact sheet in front of me that listed each interviewee's basic demographic information and his or her fourth-wave NSYR responses to questions on religion, hardship, psychological wellbeing, and altruism. Table 2 summarizes the interviewees' characteristics.

² For more information on NSYR research design, visit <http://www.youthandreligion.org/research>.

³ Further information on how we selected interviewees is available upon request.

Table 2. Interviewee Characteristics

Characteristic	N = 26
Race	
Black	6
White	20
Gender	
Female	11
Male	15
Psychological Wellbeing & Altruism	
Low	16
High	10
Location	
South	15
West	7
Northeast	4
Belief in God	
Believes in God	16
Not sure	5
Does not believe in God	5
Church Attendance	
Attends church	5
Does not attend church	21
Religion	
Protestant	7
Catholic	1
Other	2
No denomination	16

Interview Structure

I met all interviewees in a public place and recorded all the interviews on two digital recorders. Prior to their interviews, interviewees were instructed that the questions I would ask had been reviewed by Yale University's Human Research Protection Program and would not put them at risk. I reminded them that their participation was voluntary and that they could refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. I assured them that I would keep their identity and location confidential. Because I did not want them to know in advance what my theoretical questions of interest were, I told them I would be happy to answer questions about me or about the study once the formal interview was completed. To establish rapport prior to starting the interviews, I

tried to smile a lot at the start of the meeting and ask casual questions about the city where we were. I initially wondered if people would disclose the exact nature of hardships they had experienced. In nearly all cases, the interviewees revealed a traumatic event within the first 15 minutes of the interview, and the rest disclosed their hardships later on in the interview.

Normally within 24 hours of concluding the interview, I typed up a summary using notes I had taken. These memos recorded notable elements of the interviewees' manners of dressing, patterns of speech, and any awkward or revealing moments in our conversations. I also recorded the phrases or ideas that were most telling about an interviewee's narrative. I later had the full interviews transcribed and read through each transcript, taking notes on emerging themes about my major questions of interest.

Members of the project team developed a questionnaire focused on three broad areas of interest: (1) the experiences, emotions, and events that young adults associate with their relationships with parents, peers, and romantic partners; (2) young adults' religious lives, including both traditional forms of church attendance and prayer, and also thoughts about God, listening to religious music or reading religious books, and friendships with religious people; and (3) young adults' future goals regarding work and family, their sense of progress toward those goals, and the meaning garnered from key relationships and activities. After the first four interviews I revised the questionnaire, primarily to extend the questions to include more non-traditional religious beliefs and practices. I also drafted more probing questions about meaning and purpose.

Religious Narratives and Resilience

After outlining resilience, we can evaluate how the interviews I conducted help further the understanding of religion and resilience. Psychologist Kenneth Pargament's pioneering work (1997) presents a variety of ways that religion supports coping and resilience. He describes four main functions, which can operate independently or simultaneously: providing a meaning structure, generating emotional comfort or reducing anxiety, promoting social connections, and enhancing one's relationship with God himself (Pargament 2010). Many sociological accounts of religion

emphasize the instrumental benefits of religion (Riesebrodt 2010). Especially when examining religion and resilience, it is important not to overlook that, for many people, the constitutive end of religious belief and practice is establishing the right relationship with God (Mooney and Manglos-Weber 2014: forthcoming).

Pargament's work points us in the right direction, but without examining individual lives and particular narratives one cannot easily tell which aspects of religion help most with resilience and coping. The religious beliefs and practices of the young adults I interviewed spanned the spectrum from two atheists who rarely think about God (both from the West), to three devout Protestant women whose lives center on their faith and local religious communities (all from the South). Most of my interviewees attended religious services irregularly, some prayed daily, and some prayed occasionally. Among those I interviewed, the most common way religion supported resilience was by providing a meaningful structure that helped make sense of traumatic events. Second most common was narratives about prayer or meditation to calm anxiety. Third most common was a personal relationship with God, whether that was feeling a presence in meditation or praying alone with scriptures. As Pargament has noted, spiritual struggles with God sometimes worsen trauma, which is the case with Laura, who feels God is not "100 percent there" for her. Although the literature on religion and health sometimes discusses people experiencing anger at God for stress or health problems, only two of my interviewees said they felt angry with God. Both said that they later realized they could not blame God for their problems. The least common way religion supported coping or resilience among my interviewees was through social connections. Only five of my respondents attend church, but all five have very strong connections with many people from church. Several others, like Alex, had supportive connections with churchgoers, but those relationships were not regular interactions. Interestingly, several interviewees who did not believe in God received social support from people who did believe in God.

The two following narratives demonstrate how people with and without religious affiliations can have strong religious beliefs that have helped them deal with trauma. In the two narratives I present next, we see that although Monica's strong commitment to her

Baptist faith provides a center to everything in her life, even the religiously nonaffiliated like Sherry sometimes have surprisingly strong religious beliefs that have helped them deal with trauma. The difference that emerges from my interviews is hence not one between those with supernatural beliefs and religious practices and those without such beliefs and practices, but rather whether beliefs and practices are embedded in relationships, communities, and larger narratives, which enhance the power of personal beliefs and practices to support resilience.

Narrative Summaries Continued

Sherry: 25, White, from the West. She is religiously unaffiliated but God saved her.

Sherry was one of 16 respondents who believes in God, but does not have a particular religious affiliation. When we met in an affluent neighborhood out West, Sherry arrived wearing bright colored pants and had a cheerful smile. The traumas in Sherry's life relate closely to her serious heart condition called supraventricular tachycardia (SVT). Although most people with SVT, including Sherry's father and sister, live practically normal lives, Sherry's symptoms were so severe that she had three heart surgeries before the age of 15, when she finally stabilized. Her experiences between the ages of 9 and 15 of being rushed to the emergency room twice a week to have her heart restarted led Sherry to be a "morbid" child who feared that death was around the corner. She even had out-of-body experiences the hundreds of times that her heart stopped. My eyes bulged as Sherry described her painful illness and how it made it so difficult for her to have any friends. But she covered up her inner pain with a cheerful smile and even light-hearted laughter as she described her traumas.

Even though Sherry was a high school cheerleader, got straight As in high school and college, and is highly successful at work, Sherry refuses to let herself grow close to anyone emotionally. To illustrate her problems with intimacy, she bluntly told me that she coldheartedly rejected the first guy who fell in love with her. He was the first guy she ever had sex with, and she could not stand that he wanted to look her in the eyes and touch her face while they made love. She cheated on him by having causal sex with another guy who did not want intimacy, just sex. She "felt really cold and

detached” when she broke the heart of the guy who loved her and wanted to marry her. She humbly admitted she has a “sick mind” with regard to sex and intimacy. She hopes to someday learn to experience intimacy with sex.

Sherry was raised Lutheran and attended weekly services with her family growing up. But as she went through confirmation classes, she began to doubt whether Jesus was God. She was kicked out of the classes when she said, “I feel really comfortable praying to God, but this Jesus guy I think he was just a man.” Sherry’s mother called her an atheist because she does not believe Jesus is God, but Sherry insisted, “I believe in God very strongly, I just don’t know if Jesus is my homeboy.”

I asked Sherry if she ever prayed to God during her many heart failures and surgeries. Although she had previously told me she once tried to commit suicide by taking pills, Sherry’s voice slowed as she admitted there was a “memorable moment” when she tried to kill herself with razor blades. Sherry had a wondering look in her eyes as she explained, “This is when I was kind of questioning things in general and I just felt so alone, and I didn’t feel like anyone understood me, and so I was going to do it, I was going to do it, I was going to do it...I was so depressed!” Her voice became very emphatic as she repeated “I was just so hysterical, so hysterical; I was going to do it, like I had like the razor in my hand.”

But it was not just revealing the fact that she tried to commit suicide that got Sherry tongue-tied. Her speech patterns, which were full of words such as “like” and “kinda,” illustrate how much Sherry struggled to describe the supernatural experience she had on that cold bathroom floor as she sobbed uncontrollably and prepared to end her life: “I was like crying and I remember I just had this moment where I just felt calm and like just relaxed and just felt like just kinda something on my shoulder like, you’re okay, don’t do it, like it’s going to be okay [laughs].” Her laughter indicated incredulity and her own difficulty in speaking about what happened to her. I did not interrupt her as she described this experience because I wanted to hear her own words, even if she was rambling.

Sherry continued trying to find words to describe her experience:

Like I just felt this like weird calm and I was just like, whoa, I think that's God [laughs]. Like I remember thinking, like I just couldn't explain what it was, but I just felt like this calm sensation and I just decided not to do it and I was just like oh that's weird, it was so instant that I just like, I don't know.

Given her earlier revelations that she struggles with intimacy, her last statement about this “memorable moment” really struck me: “[This event] just always kind of impacted like the way I thought, like I’ve just never really felt alone since then.” When Sherry finally paused after telling this dramatic story, I gently probed her about how this experience affected her faith. Sherry still struggles to understand what happened that day. She even read books about Christianity and Buddhism, but nothing she read matches her own experiences with God. Sherry clearly admitted that she does not understand what happened to her that day on the bathroom floor. She added that she is not sure she is even meant to understand it, and she’s okay with that. If God helped her this one time when she was so desperate, does Sherry ask God to help her with her health or psychological problems? Sherry said she is not a Christian, but she likes her Christian friends and respects her parents’ fervent beliefs. She even went with her friends a few times to some Evangelical megachurches, but found them “culty.” She did not like that people acted so feverishly moved by God and then asked God for help, often through the mediation of a pastor. “I don’t really like to ask for anything because I feel like again that’s kind of like using religion as, like to your benefit, which I don’t think you’re supposed to do anyway to get what you want out of something,” she explained. She particularly does not want to ask a man—a pastor or even Jesus—to mediate between her and God.

Through praying all alone in her home or by going out for long walks in the mountains, Sherry does try to connect with the force that saved her life. Although Sherry was on anti-depressants during her teenage years, she did not like feeling “numb” and lamented not having a normal range of emotions. Instead, she meditates when she feels down. She has never felt as low as she did that night with the razor blade in her hand. Although she goes to extreme lengths to block intimacy with other people, Sherry takes great consolation in “a presence” that is with her all the time, even though she does not know what that presence is.

At the end of the interview, I asked Sherry how her relationship with her family had changed over time. This was the only time during the entire interview that Sherry displayed sadness. She sobbed while describing her estrangement from her older half-brother, a “lost soul.” Sherry’s mother fled her abusive first marriage with Sherry’s elder half-brother. Sherry’s mother remarried to Sherry’s father. Although Sherry’s father never wanted kids, especially daughters, Sherry’s mother had two girls with her second husband. Sherry idolized her older half-brother, but he rebelled and then ran away when she was 10 years old. Her half-brother became homeless, got involved with crime and drugs, and was eventually institutionalized with schizophrenia.

Sherry admitted that talking about her brother is “the one thing that kind of like chokes me up.” She added that she worries so much about her brother that she talks to God for him. “So if I do pray he’s like the number one person that I kind of like ask for, like ‘If you do watch out for anyone, can you watch out for him?’”

Sitting outside at a Starbucks on a sunny day at the base of beautiful mountains, tears rolled down my face. Sherry had even awkwardly laughed as she described her suicide attempts as “not the most glamorous thing ever.” Seeing Sherry cry for her brother led me to cry for Sherry’s inability to feel emotions for herself. Even though Sherry earns \$100,000 a year, just bought a house, and drives a fancy car, her greatest hope is to develop intimate relationships so that she could be “a functioning human being, a member of society.”

Although Sherry is outwardly successful, her narrative reveals that she is unable to find the depth in her human relationships and her relationship with the supernatural that she seeks. She believes without a doubt that a supernatural force stopped her from killing herself. She always feels that supernatural “presence” with her. She prays to God to help her despondent brother. Although she believes God is capable of saving her life and helping her brother in his suffering, she is unwilling to ask God to relieve her own suffering. Sherry expressed both social and theological reasons why she feels uncomfortable attending religious services. She has read extensively about various religions. Although Sherry can understand why it is difficult for her to connect with others, and to God, she does not know what to do to move forward. She has yet

to fit her own life narrative, including her religious experiences, into a larger narrative that would give her journey a sense of purpose and direction.

Monica: 26, White, from the South. She gives thanks to God for everything, all the time.

Sherry's lack of a larger narrative within which to understand her experiences contrasts with Monica's narrative. Monica, a 26-year old, White woman I met in the South, described a strong personal faith, buttressed by strong relationships at church and a loving relationship with her husband. In Monica's narrative, we can see how all of the four elements of religion and resilience identified by Pargament work in tandem, and have allowed her to be personally successful, happy, and give back to her community.

Monica bounced joyously into Chick-Fil-A in a suburb of a Southern city wearing her favorite football team's shirt and beaming cheerfully. The first thing Monica told me was that her parents recently divorced because her father is a "cheating butthead." When she was a baby, her father spent five years in jail for having sex with students at his school. He became a Christian while in jail and even earned a Master of Divinity when he got out of jail. However, he continued to cheat on Monica's mother and eventually left her and moved in with his female boss. Among other things, Monica's father taught her that there are a lot of fake Christians, and he taught her exactly what not to do in marriage.

Monica admitted that she wavered from the Baptist faith of her childhood, especially during her first year at a local state university. Monica loved watching football at fraternity houses, and failed out of school because she was partying and drinking too much. She moved back home and met her husband while working at a local grocery store. This was the first clear instance that Monica cited God's providence in her life: "God is sovereign, and that was his plan all along." Her husband is a devout Christian who slowly and gently pulled her away from the wrong people.

Monica grew up Southern Baptist but is now Reformed Baptist. Reformed Baptists trace their roots to the 1689 Baptist Confession of London, which was an attempt to go back to the real claims of Martin Luther's Reformation. Southern Baptists today, according to Monica, are just like Sunday Christians who dress up

and want to be part of a group. Although Monica said her first conversion was at age 10, she admitted that she liked the “attention of the world” and “went a little crazy,” especially in college. Largely because of her husband’s influence, she returned to her faith and knows for sure that her faith is “the truth, the way, and the life.”

She articulated clear reasons for becoming a Reformed Baptist, demonstrating greater theological knowledge than any of the other interviewees. Monica repeatedly told me that her husband teaches Sunday school at their church, and they go to church activities four or five times a week. Her church is her “family,” especially since her husband’s mother and stepfather died in a tragic motorcycle accident. “We know that they were saved and they’re in heaven,” which she said helped with their grief. Their church is small, with only 30 people. Most of their friends are from church, and Monica said that “they felt the loss that we felt” when her husband’s parents died. Monica recounted that the event was bittersweet, as she and her husband inherited land and money when his parents died. They used the money to buy an apartment complex that she and her husband manage. The majority of her paycheck as a nurse goes straight to their retirement account. The same morning that she met me she had just come from the bank where she and her husband had gotten a mortgage to buy their first home.

She further explained that being close to Christ makes it easier to handle suffering in her own life, and the suffering she sees as an emergency room nurse. Monica prays at work for patience and for people’s physical healing. She constantly gives thanks to God because she loves her job. Monica must have used the word “thankful” about 25 times during our interview, and about half of those times she said she was thankful to God. Her younger siblings have not fared as well as she has in dealing with her “narcissistic” father. Monica helps her mom and three younger siblings emotionally and financially.

Monica constantly praised her husband for his virtue, frugality, and strong faith. She had no problem admitting that they have a very traditional marriage. Her church teaches that a woman’s place is in the home, and she agrees with that. But, she added that you can work if you must, as long as your family is always the most important thing. Although she submits to her husband as the head

of the household, they believe in a covenant marriage. This involves bringing God into their marriage through their church community, who holds her husband accountable to God for how he treats her. When needed, her husband receives counsel from the pastor, and she receives counsel from the pastor's wife. She further explained that the relationship itself is a "good" that has to be maintained. She believes their relationship is more important than the individuals in it. Although her husband is the head of their household, they make most decisions together. Her husband has ultimate authority on finances, though, and discourages her from buying the kinds of designer clothes and handbags she used to buy when she aspired to be a "Southern belle." She is thankful for his prudence because they have saved money.

When I asked Monica if her hardships had made her a stronger person or harmed her, she said that her faith has helped her to not become depressed. She said that her hardships prepared her to deal with tough things. Although she plans a lot for her future, she said she did not "have ultimate control, because he [God] does." Monica stood out among my interviewees for having a clear doctrinal understanding of her faith. For example, when I asked her to describe her God, she gave a detailed answer describing God's characteristics and the meaning of mercy:

I know that there's God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They've all been there from the beginning, and they'll all be there till the end...He is just, he is love, but at the same time, you have to realize we're sinners. He's holy, those two cannot coincide unless he has mercy on us. The ultimate show of his mercy and grace was sending his son to die for our sins and imputing his son's holiness and righteousness onto the ones that he's called to be believers.

She does not think God is "my lovey-dovey best friend, but I can go to him with my needs." Because there is this gap between God and man, she emphatically said she would never let her future kids wear the type of shirts some people used to wear at her high school that said, "Jesus is my homeboy." At the end of the interview, Monica revealed that she and her husband have not yet been able to conceive a child. For doctrinal reasons, she only believes in conception through sexual intercourse. She is studying

the body's natural fertility cycles to try to conceive a child. If they can not conceive naturally, they plan to adopt children. When Monica's husband picked her up from Chick-Fil-A, she explained that they would listen to someone reading John Calvin's teachings on a podcast as they drove, celebrating the new home they had just bought and hoped to fill with children.

Monica's narrative illustrates how four ways that Pargament describes religion (2010) can contribute to and reinforce resilience. For example, the social connections she has at church strengthen her personal devotion. In addition, having a larger meaning structure to understand her in-laws' tragic death does not take away her sadness but keeps her from getting depressed. In comparing Sherry and Monica's narratives, we can see that both Sherry and Monica are seeking meaning structures, and both seek a relationship with God or the supernatural. For both, their relationships with the supernatural comfort their anxiety. The difference is that Monica's religious practices and beliefs are grounded in a series of relationships with her husband, their pastors, and their whole church community. Sherry has undoubtedly overcome much hardship, but she admitted that few people even know about her struggles. She feels socially isolated and has few ties to any social institutions. Monica's narrative is embedded in a meaningful structure that Sherry seeks but still lacks.

Moral Purpose, Cultural Narratives, and Social Structures

Few interviewees talked about religion as profoundly as Monica. However, everyone I talked to, even the religiously unaffiliated and the atheists, were reflective about their purposes in this world and asked moral questions, such as: "Is there a finish line to my suffering?", "Is there a happiness that will last longer than the buzz of drugs and alcohol?", and "How can I give back for the blessings I received?" Perhaps because everyone I talked to had experienced unexpected, difficult life events, they did not see their lives or God in terms of efficiency or control, characteristic of the managerial, bureaucratic world that MacIntyre (2007 [1981]) says is the part of the modern condition (or modern illusion). Rather than seeing human persons as purpose-centered and meaning-seeking, in sociology—even in sociology of religion—we often

implicitly or explicitly portray people as strategic, utilitarian, and individualistic (Archer 2000; Archer 2011; Mooney 2014: Forthcoming; Smith 2010). Perhaps it was my interviewees' suffering and trauma that broke this modern American narrative of success and control.

Understanding resilience hence requires understanding people's views of their moral purpose. Religious narratives, such as Monica's, provide coherence between a personal moral narrative and a communal moral narrative that tie traumatic events to a higher purpose. Religious narratives can give people a sense of meaning and direction despite setbacks, slip-ups, and pain. Like Monica, other devoutly religious people I interviewed had teleological narratives that referred back to God's plans for them: God did this, now I'm going there, my life has a purpose, and my hardship prepared me to help others.

How well do survey measures of religion such as attendance at services, belief in God, or even frequency of prayer, capture the search for moral purpose among young adults today? Surveys may shed light on some specific beliefs or practices, but narratives are needed in order to understand how people link those beliefs and practices to moral purposes. As Peter Berger noted, we do not have a sacred canopy uniting us all into one cosmos (1967), and we know that fewer and fewer young adults claim a particular sacred umbrella, such as a religious denomination or subculture, that ties their moral purpose to a larger narrative (Smith 1998). Even if traditional forms of religious belief and practice have declined, it does not necessarily follow that people are not asking moral questions to create an overarching meaning in their lives.

Although one might expect people who have undergone trauma to report dramatic supernatural interventions, only two people I interviewed discussed miraculous events. One was Sherry's experience of a supernatural force that stopped her from committing suicide. The other was Renee, a woman I met in the South who was sexually abused by her stepfather and was "into self-mutilation," promiscuity, and drinking. She was raised Southern Baptist but did not really practice religion until she had a dramatic conversion to a Pentecostal community, which helped her experience physical healing of bodily ailments and healing of painful memories. After Renee's conversion, God called her to

give her whole life to helping other young women who had been abused, so she enrolled in a Pentecostal ministry school to prepare for her own healing ministry. In contrast, Sherry's miraculous experience did not lead to a commitment to any religious community.

Renee and Sherry's dramatic supernatural experiences were uncommon. Much more often, as people healed from trauma, they began to see God's action behind ordinary events. Therefore, beyond just asking about the frequency of certain religious beliefs and practices, understanding religious narratives tells us how people's experiences with the sacred evolve in relation to the most important events, relationships, and desires in their lives. Even for those who do return to traditional religious practices—such as reading the Bible more frequently or attending services—it is also important to understand mundane ways they see God working in their lives. Religious narratives extend beyond pious practices and include finding sacred meanings behind ordinary events.

For example, Alex's narrative of turning away from a life of crime and drugs included learning to see supernatural meanings behind mundane events. Although Alex did start attending church again and reading the Bible daily, his experiences of God did not all happen while engaging in religious activities. Rather, numerous ordinary but surprising events reassured Alex that God was looking out for him. For example, one day Alex was feeling terrible and went to a friend's house. His friend's seven-year old sister looked at him, holding her teddy bear, and told him everything would be okay. Alex attributed moral significance to that event: God was speaking to him through that girl. Another time, Alex showed up to register for classes at a local community college. The person at the desk told Alex that he had just called Alex the previous day to ask him to come in and apply for a special scholarship for classes. Once again, Alex saw that event as a sign that God was guiding him. Alex and several others were very clear that even though they prayed daily, they did not expect God to heal them miraculously. But praying and trusting in God helped them to see how God leads them through their struggles, often in very ordinary ways. Discovering moral significance in ordinary events is thus crucial to resilience. Although all my interviewees sought moral purpose, what differed were the cultural narratives and social structures that

influenced their versions of the moral significance of everyday events and relationships.

Although it is common to contrast religious people as having beliefs in unseen or unknowable things with atheists who do not have beliefs about God, even the atheists I interviewed had confronted events in their lives they could not explain. These events led them to reflect on the moral purpose guiding their lives. For example, one man from the West named George described himself as an atheist. His mother's death when he was a teenager left him very sad. "It sucked," he said several times. His mother's death threw him down a path of drugs and alcohol that he was fortunate to abandon with the help of good friends, including one who is a devout Christian. Looking back, George has regrets about his behavior, and knows he is lucky to have turned his life around. His greatest moral purpose is maintaining a strong relationship with his father, spending time with friends, and treating his girlfriend well.

Steve, who also lives in the West, became an alcoholic in college and describes himself as agnostic. After blacking out from drinking nightly for several months, and after a scary event in Las Vegas, Steve quit drinking cold turkey. How did he suddenly give up his addiction to alcohol and remain substance-free for the last seven years? Steve knows he is lucky alcohol did not get the best of him like it did his mother, but he could not explain why he escaped the bondage to alcohol that ruined his mother's life. He also knew he was lucky that his mother's alcoholism did not damage him emotionally as much as it did his older brother, who is unhappy and estranged from nearly everyone.

For most interviewees, finding moral purpose nearly always involved some form of transcendence—going beyond their own personal experience of the world and connecting to others. For example, Steve and George ask clear questions about the right ways of being and acting in the world, but they do not look to traditional religion to answer those questions. Even those who are not believers in supernatural powers expressed concerns for higher goods that are not material and not individualistic. For example, both George and Steve placed their highest values on relationships. Steve is very successful financially but laments that he works too

hard to enjoy it. Thinking about his future, he and his wife want to start a family. "I want to be wealthy in relationships," he explained.

In contrast to the stereotype of atheists being hostile to religion or people rejecting traditional religion, George, who said he does not believe in God, and Steve, who is not sure he believes in God, acknowledged that religious faith and religious communities can provide a sense of moral purpose. Interestingly, both George and Steve said that their one Christian friend stood out to them as someone with a clear sense of purpose. In both cases, their Christian friend was the most supportive when they turned away from alcohol abuse.

Jessica is another example of how even those who do not identify personally as religious found religious people or communities to help them with their trauma. Jessica, who is white, 27 years old, and lives out West, does not believe in God. Although she has never been to college, she sounded like she had read Emile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995 [1912]) as she described the powerful group solidarity among Mormons who helped her stay on track during her teenage years. Growing up, Jessica's mother was sick with cancer and addicted to painkillers. Her father worked overtime to support the family. Jessica largely raised herself with little parental guidance or supervision. During high school, Jessica attended all the Mormon social activities she could. She particularly loved the knitting club. But because Jessica does not believe in God, she felt like a free-rider and eventually stopped going to the Mormon church events.

In contrast to Sherry, who believes in supernatural powers but feels uncomfortable around social community of believers, Jessica loves the social aspect of the Mormon church, but does not believe in anything supernatural. Durkheim argued that religious rituals were about group solidarity itself, not a connection to the supernatural. Interestingly for Jessica, the only time she has experienced such strong group solidarity was in a group of people who believes in the supernatural. Although many people like Jessica had close friendships, only two interviewees described secular social rituals that provide group solidarity, and both were describing their military communities.

Despite not believing in God, Jessica described how thoughts about God just pop into her head, and she asks God to help her. As

she explained, “when you get into a bad position...when you’re upset or when you need something or you’re scared, you want to believe in something bigger.” Jessica finds comfort in believing that everything happens for a reason, even if she does not know exactly what the reason is. Believing things happen for a reason, albeit an unknown one, and that something bigger than you exists, even though she does not know what that something is, is better than “bottling all these emotions and taking on all this stress... so sometimes when you’re upset you’re hoping that there’s something out there that’s like ‘please help me.’” Struggling to find words to describe how she prays occasionally, Jessica shrugged her shoulders and incessantly bounced her leg under the table. Jessica’s home situation led her to be depressed, but she managed to get off medication for bipolar disorder. As her mom was addicted to legal painkillers, Jessica fears developing an addiction herself. She has slowly learned to regulate her emotions. Her mom died two years before I met her, which freed her from the responsibility of caring for her mother with whom she never really bonded, Jessica feels free to pursue her dream of going to college.

Although Jessica had mitigated the worst aspects of her family crisis, she admitted that her life lacks a clear forward direction. When she graduated from high school, her father expected her to care for her sick mother and would not help her pay for college. His lack of support for her desire to attend college led her to move out as soon as she turned 18. She supports herself working as a bartender and a physical therapist. She still wants to attend college in the future. She stopped attending the Mormon church years ago, but has not found any secular groups which provide her with solidarity and direction.

Just as the people who called themselves atheist or agnostic were brought up in households with little religious belief or practice, those brought up in religiously devout households rarely abandoned all personal belief. More often, institutional practices of religion were replaced with personal and often inconsistent forms of practice and belief. For example, another woman I interviewed in the South, Bethany, has drifted from her strict Baptist upbringing. She prays occasionally on her own, and said it is important to do what is right. She calls herself a Christian by background, but feels more comfortable naming her own faith:

“Bethanyism.” She seemed to have no idea that Robert Bellah and colleagues found something very similar they called “Sheilaism” in *Habits of the Heart* (1985) nearly 20 years before. Bethany’s view of religion entails no obligations to God and no obligations to a community. She does have a sense of obligation to her husband, and sees him as a partner, but she lacks involvement in any religious or social group that would tie her to a larger narrative or provide a way to give to others. The similarities between Bethanyism and Sheilaism illustrate that, ironically, the narrative of finding one’s own individual religion draws on larger culture around us. The lack of community participation among some of the people I interviewed leaves them mostly with some form of Bethanyism: groping to find a larger meaning to make sense of their own narrative.

Conclusion

Psychologists have shown that even the most vulnerable human can take baby steps towards resilience. Sociologists have further shown that community leaders, civic institutions, and strong relationships can help both people and communities bounce back from hardship and generate new relationships and institutions. Studies of religion and resilience have enumerated ways in which beliefs in God, religious practices, social connections, and larger meaning structures help people cope with hardship. But most research on trauma still starts from a disease model of health and focuses on how people cope with the negative effects of stress. Understanding resilience requires asking what is good for persons and societies. Resilience as sustainable motion toward a *telos* requires identifying more than a material or individual end for persons and communities. Resilience requires transforming bad things into personal growth, and finding moral purpose in both large narratives and ordinary events.

Where do young adults find moral purpose today? Some people I interviewed viewed their struggles as part of God’s providence and his plan for their lives. Others emphasized a local sense of meaning focusing on their primary personal relationships with friends and family. But the personal narratives I have recounted raise questions about social structures: What are the historical reasons that resources both psychologists and

sociologists identify that help people both cope with trauma and be resilient—strong families, strong communities, involvement in religious institutions or civic groups—are so weak among many of the young adults I spoke with? Everyone desired close relationship with family, friends, and peers, but many people did not have high-quality relationships—not even in their families of origin. Why are some people's lives devoid of even one person whom they love, trust, and share intimate emotions with? Laura's narrative is telling in this regard: her trauma is not only personal, as lonely and addicted people do not build society.

Because recovering from trauma is a process that unfolds over time, I plan to re-interview all 26 respondents during the next year. How will they have progressed toward their goals in work, family, and relationships? Will some who were moving forward have slipped backward? Will any have changed their religious beliefs and practices? Will new events or relationships have influence the meaning attributed to past events? Future interviews might also focus on goods that are inherent in relationships—trust, love and intimacy came up repeatedly as goods people seek in their primary relationships. The lack of relational goods such as intimacy, love, and trust also put people at risk to experience trauma, either because those who should love them hurt them, or because people turn to alcohol and drugs to cope with emotional pain. Understanding the contexts, practices, and narratives that create and sustain such relational goods is crucial to understanding resilience, coping, and chronic dysfunction.

There are numerous ways to help people cope with trauma. Economic opportunity, psychological counseling, psychiatric medication, and social capital may all help people move toward a *telos*. But a *telos* entails a higher moral purpose to life, and such a purpose requires transcendence—going beyond oneself. Intimate relationships provide great fulfillment but also can be hurtful and disappointing. Meaningful communities buttress and guide intimate relationships. The narratives I have presented indicate which aspects of American culture and social structure influence vulnerability and resilience. Personal religious faith that is often distant from a religious community, weak families, and the lack of good jobs for the middle class all do not bode well for resilience. It is likely a combination of economic changes, family changes, and

cultural changes have made people more vulnerable to a variety of stressful events. But overcoming vulnerability is not only about changing social structures; it is also about discovering a moral purpose that ties one's own life to a larger, meaningful narrative and aligning one's actions with that purpose.

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TO PRESERVE THE MOUNTAINS AND THE COMMUNITY: INDIGENOUS ECOTOURISM AS A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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Abstract

This research explores the role of community control, various community characteristics, and inter-community coalitions in facilitating the viability of ecotourism projects. The goal is to generate a model that can guide future research efforts about ecotourism projects in Indigenous communities. Results from two communities in Oaxaca, Mexico show that in addition to community control, factors increasing accessibility (infrastructure), visibility (public relations) and connectivity (collaboration with other organizations) are important for project success. Community controlled ecotourism may have a positive impact on the community itself, including resource

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development, decreased migration, and control over cultural and environmental exploitation.

Introduction

With increased international awareness of the need to preserve the environment, sustainable development is becoming an important focus for transnational, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in developing countries. The Brundtland Report, written by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), and published as *Our Common Future*, defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (1987:43). In this process the “essential needs” of the poor are to be given precedence in development projects, and “both economic and social development must be redefined in terms of sustainability...” (WCED 1987:43). Although commonly accepted in development literature, these guidelines are not specific enough to direct and implement sustainable development policies, especially within the context of marginalized indigenous communities.

While environmental preservation and poverty elimination remain the cornerstones of sustainable development, throughout the past two decades an increasing emphasis has been placed on local community participation in and community control of sustainable development projects. More recent projects often focus on ecotourism, or sustainable tourism, as both ecologically and socio-culturally sound strategies to sustain indigenous, community-owned natural resources. These ecotourism projects strive to include mechanisms that both ensure the profits generated by ecotourism primarily benefit the indigenous community rather than outside agencies, and also build a community's capacity to autonomously create additional revenue-generating, sustainable development projects. As such, the partnerships between indigenous communities and outside organizations are often characterized by tensions and power imbalances caused by resource differences, clashing values, and incompatible practices (Mawdsley et al. 2002; Roberts, Jones, and Froehling 2005).

Ecotourism refers to programs that have less of a negative environmental impact compared with traditional forms of tourism

(Stronza, 2008). Although ecotourism is not specifically mentioned in the Brundtland Report as a form of sustainable development, it similarly involves the concerted participation of local communities, state agencies, transnational funding agencies, and international tourists. Community-managed ecotourism projects provide an opportunity to examine how sustainable development ideals translate into practice, and how local interests intersect with international interests. In addition, development processes may support or challenge indigenous traditions via potentially contradictory project objectives. Advocates for ecotourism projects seek to avoid the economic and cultural exploitation inherent in international mass tourism. Nevertheless, revenues generated through ecotourism may primarily benefit individuals outside indigenous communities.

Within the context of community control and decision-making, the focus of ecotourism is expanding from environmental protection to a greater emphasis on community autonomy. Increasingly, ecotourism projects struggle with how to foster genuine community involvement in planning and decision-making, which conflicts with the management ideology of many international funding agencies. Western management styles are characterized by hierarchical authority structures and project oversight designed to maximize efficiency (Roberts et al. 2005). This “managerialism” approach promotes project oversight based on hierarchical models, which often conflict with the horizontal decision-making style of indigenous community assemblies. In contrast to managerialism, indigenous consensus-based decision-making styles provide a participatory mechanism that allows communities to retain control of project oversight and to distribute resultant profits equitably among community members. At the same time, complete rejection of alliances with outside influences can lead to the failure of projects because of isolation and a lack of resources.

Some indigenous communities in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, are initiating community-controlled productive projects, including ecotourism projects, as a means of economic development. Their goals include community self-sufficiency, environmental protection, cultural preservation, political empowerment, and reduced migration out of rural communities. Our research focuses

on two ecotourism projects in communities in Oaxaca as possible means of sustainable development and community empowerment, and explores which community characteristics and dynamics facilitate the viability of ecotourism projects. Specifically, this research examines the roles of community autonomy and community control in the success of ecotourism projects as means of sustainable community livelihood. The definition of what constitutes success and viability in the context of ecotourism projects is complex. For example, defining success by the number of tourists is problematic because, by this standard, projects could be too successful in the sense that the burden of hosting tourists could outweigh benefits to the community. We consider project viability in the context of community self-sufficiency and wellbeing, as well as community members' perceptions of project success. We argue that community control of projects through participatory governance is essential to success, while community autonomy must be balanced with connections to other communities and organizations. In addressing these issues, we propose a model to guide future research efforts and policies about ecotourism projects in indigenous communities to increase empowerment and sustainable livelihoods.

Literature Review

Definitions of what constitutes "genuine" ecotourism remain contested. However, a working definition first proposed by Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin in 1983 was adopted with modifications by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1996. The IUCN defines ecotourism as "environmentally responsible travel to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples" (Ceballos-Lascuráin 1996:1). A great deal of literature focuses on the sustainability of tourism without necessarily advocating for the level of community control and local economic benefit inherent to ecotourism (Gössling, Hall, and Weaver 2009; Ritchie and Crouch 2003). As exemplified in the IUCN's definition, the concept of ecotourism originates in and combines aspects of both sustainable nature tourism and cultural tourism, but adds the requirements of

social and economic benefits to local peoples. However, the IUCN's definition lacks any reference to local participation in decision-making processes related to project implementation and management, and in this aspect it remains incomplete. Other researchers have attempted to refine this definition. For example, Honey includes political empowerment in her definition of ecotourism (2008), while Zeppel further clarifies that the "key aspects of indigenous ecotourism include a nature-based product, indigenous ownership and the presentation of indigenous environmental and cultural knowledge"¹ (2006:11).

Ecotourism continues to grow as an industry, and ecotourism projects exist in every region of the world (Zeppel 2006). Proposed as a panacea for "underdevelopment" (World Ecotourism Summit 2002), much of the literature on ecotourism focuses on the environmental and cultural impacts of increased tourism in natural areas. For instance, Cerina (2008) provides a complex statistical tool designed to predict the ideal balance of environmental impact, degradation abatement, and tourist density, and suggests that these three factors must be in equilibrium for ecotourism to be considered a success. He concludes that the abatement of negative environmental effects is easier to achieve among tourists seeking a "low-tourist density" experience, relative to traditional "mass-tourism." Cerina's research concurs with the findings of Rinzin, Vermeulen, and Glassbergen's study of ecotourism initiatives in Bhutan, which indicate tourism development has the least negative environmental and cultural impact when it pursues a strategy that provides high value for the community while causing low impact on the daily lives of residents (2007). However, the models of ecotourism offered by Cerina (2008) and Rinzin et al. (2007) presuppose a high degree of national government control of tourism development, rather than a locally generated movement to achieve the goals of sustainability. It remains unclear to what extent local communities achieve economic benefits or empowerment from these state-operated policy initiatives.

¹ Ethnotourism tends to make reproduction and commodification of specific aspects of local culture the focus of the tourist experience (Yang 2011), whereas ecotourism, although potentially containing aspects of ethnotourism, focuses primarily on the sustainable ecological impacts of tourist activities.

One appeal of ecotourism lies in its goal to mitigate burdens on the environment and local cultures resulting from increased tourism to an area. Some researchers caution that the negative impact of tourists on the environment and indigenous cultures is inevitable (Place 1998), while other researchers suggest that endemically derived solutions can mitigate the most egregious negative impacts from tourism if local communities are able to exercise control over tourists' activities (Zeppel 1998). Comparisons of ecotourism and traditional mass tourism suggest that tourism in any form potentially compromises the cultural integrity of targeted indigenous communities (Place 1998).

In response to such concerns, the Québec Declaration on Ecotourism, a product of the 2002 World Ecotourism Summit, makes specific recommendations to indigenous communities for dealing with tourism programs. For example, the declaration recommends that a community develop a strategic plan to ensure collective benefits, "including human, physical, financial, and social capital development, and improved access to technical information" (World Ecotourism Summit 2002:2). Furthermore, communities should "strengthen, nurture and encourage the community's ability to maintain and use traditional skills that are relevant to ecotourism, particularly home-based arts and crafts, agricultural produce, traditional housing and landscaping that use local natural resources in a sustainable manner" (World Ecotourism Summit 2002:2). The summit report also called on the World Summit on Sustainable Development to more fully apply the principles of sustainable development to tourism, but cautioned that sustainable tourism must include participatory mechanisms to be considered ecotourism (World Ecotourism Summit 2002). In Mexico, much of the literature on ecotourism focuses on reforestation projects on the coastline (Momsen 2002; Zeppel 2006). These projects have been controlled by large hotels and have not emphasized the participatory components of ecotourism's ideology. In the state of Oaxaca, ecotourism programs initiated by large hotels on the seashore to reforest depleted areas near large luxury resorts do not inherently provide any mechanisms for community control or benefit (Zeppel 2006). However, in the mountainous interior of Oaxaca there is a growing movement for community-controlled ecotourism (Zeppel 2006).

Community Control of Ecotourism Projects

Community control of indigenous ecotourism is vital for maintaining sustainability and mitigating negative tourist impact, two indicators of successful ecotourism (Zeppel 1998). Community control of and participation in ecotourism projects increases the social capacity to initiate additional productive projects (Cater 1994). Such community control, although acknowledged by international funding agencies in the sustainable development arena, is often lacking as projects are carried out with the managerial and organizational styles of international NGOs. As De Frece and Poole (2008) show, when international funding agencies do not take into account local cultures, value systems, and decision-making styles, they are unlikely to propose productive projects that will be embraced by the targeted communities. Alternative development models to managerialism include community-level, horizontally oriented oversight processes, such as that practiced in the *campesino a campesino* (farmer to farmer) approach. This sustainable agricultural movement promotes grassroots development, whereby productive projects in one village are implemented by neighboring villages after project success has been observed directly (Holt-Gimenez 2006).

Community control not only ensures local commitment to the success of a project, but also helps counter the potential “profit leakage” to stakeholders outside the community, a common problem in the ecotourism industry (Place 1998). However, profit leakage to airlines and other “nonecological corporate stakeholders in the tourism industry is beyond the control of communities. Although airlines and other international travel corporations will continue to benefit from ecotourism, the primary objective is that the money spent by tourists for tours, accommodations, and other amenities and attractions accrues to the visited community and primarily benefits community members and their environment. Excluding local populations from project planning disadvantages them not only in terms of the specific tourism project, but also in their ability to implement other forms of community development (Cater 1994).

As with all attempts at sustainable development, ecotourism can be implemented in multiple ways, some of which may not provide for the economic benefit of local communities. In Costa

Rica, a park-based nature tourism project supported by significant outside investment and government policy did not promote local entrepreneurship (Place 1998). This project had an adverse impact on local economies because residents did not retain control of the projects and were marginalized by larger tourism operators. Place found that “The pace of outside investment is not allowing the villagers the luxury of time to accumulate their own capital to invest in tourist facilities and services” (1998:113). This problem can be mitigated by including community control and decision-making, which are key aspects of successful ecotourism: “The debate is currently not *whether* local communities should be involved in the development of [eco-] tourism to their areas, but *how* they should be involved” (Stronza 2008:4).

Sustainable forestry projects can contribute to the success of ecotourism projects. Sustainable forestry, defined as forestry management in accordance with the principles of sustainable development (United Nations 1992), supports ecotourism by maintaining the health and beauty of forests and other natural resources. In some communities, sustainable forestry projects provide a model of how indigenous communities can put participatory management and communal profit-sharing into practice (Antinori and Rausser 2006). In community-managed, commercial forestry production, “the community may form a commercial corporation (for example, a *sociedad*...). Each individual member of the community is a *socio*—the term for a part-owner, partner, or shareholder in a labor-managed firm—yet, the shares are not defined nor traded” (Antinori and Rausser 2006:515). Ecotourism projects designed as *sociedades* can potentially increase the economic benefits to all community members while the community oversight mechanisms inherent to this approach help ensure continued community control of projects.

An analysis of the relationship between community characteristics and the viability of ecotourism projects must consider the local context. The next section provides background information on the state of Oaxaca and the key features of Oaxacan indigenous communities. Of particular interest to our questions about community control are unique local participatory governance structures in these communities.

Table 1. Oaxaca State Demographic Information

Municipalities	570
Population	3,506,821
Indigenous-Speaking	31%
Reside in Indigenous Households	42%
Employed in Agricultural Sector	37%
Reside in Rural Areas	
Oaxaca State	53%
All of Mexico	24%
Population Density	
Oaxaca State	28 people/km ²
All of Mexico	53 people/km ²

Source: INEGI 2005a, 2005b

Characteristics of Indigenous Communities in Oaxaca

The state of Oaxaca is located in Southern Mexico, reaching from the Pacific coast to the mountainous region of the Sierra Norte. Oaxaca contains 570 distinct municipalities (Table 1). Of the 3.5 million inhabitants, 31 percent speak an indigenous language, and 42 percent live in a household in which an indigenous language is spoken. The official government practice of using language to indicate indigeneity leads to an underreporting of the number of people who identify as indigenous; according to estimates provided by Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) about two thirds of all Oaxacans are indigenous. Alongside Chiapas, this represents the highest proportion of indigenous people in a Mexican state. Residents employed in the agricultural sector make up 37 percent of the populace, while 53 percent of the population lives in rural areas. This is more than twice the proportion of rural residents for Mexico as a whole (24 percent). The average population density of Oaxaca is 38 people per square kilometer, compared with the national average of 53 people per square kilometer (INEGI 2005a; INEGI 2005b).

Oaxaca is the second poorest and least developed state in Mexico. In 1996, the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement ended Mexico's farm subsidies, which drove many small farmers off the land because they could no longer compete

with U.S. agribusiness on prices for corn and other commodities (Bacon 2004). The majority of migrants to the northern border region and to the U.S. originate from Oaxaca (Bacon 2004). This outmigration has turned many communities into ghost towns, as most residents of working age have left, leaving only the young and old, and those working in the tourist sector producing arts and crafts.

The indigenous *pueblos* (simultaneously references a people and their communities) or *comunidades* (communities) in Oaxaca have unique features that may affect participation in and success of sustainable development initiatives. The communities emphasize collective responsibility and mutual obligation over individual rights (Esteva 2006), which is reflected in their consensus-based governance style, referred to as *usos y costumbres* (uses and customs), and the traditional system of community reciprocity, called *cargo*. According to Adler (2012), communal councils decide in assemblies about which community-owned projects to start, who will be involved in project activities, and how to manage the enterprises. They also decide to what degree the community should retain its autonomy or engage in ventures with outside organizations or other communities.

Since the late 1990s, the Mexican government has allowed indigenous communities the option of limited self-governance at the submunicipal level through the practices of *Usos y Costumbres*. The state of Oaxaca has more communities governed through *Usos y Costumbres* than any other state in Mexico:

Oaxaca stands out as the Mexican state whose laws have gone the furthest towards recognizing indigenous rights to self-governance. Municipalities are allowed to decide whether to govern themselves through partisan balloting or through diverse forms of customary law. For more than a decade, 418 of Oaxaca's 570 municipalities have been governed by non-Western community decision-making and do not require the intermediation of political parties. (Fox 2007:535)

The system of *cargo* supports the functioning of *Usos y Costumbres* because it is "a system of rotating civic and religious responsibilities among registered community members, based on merit accumulated by service in a rising hierarchy of civic

positions” (Antinori and Rausser 2006:515). The *cargo* system obliges community members to perform unpaid work that benefits the entire community.

The concept of community is itself a contested term that often has different meanings depending on a speaker’s frame of reference. Champagne notes how Western and indigenous North American conceptualizations of community differ:

The decentralized, consensual character of tribal political and social processes are very important to understand when discussing conceptions like community...Indian communities are not a given, as is often implied in the Western interpretation of ‘community,’ but are possible only through consent among potentially participant local groups. This consensual social-political-cultural community of Indian groups is possible because of the economic, kinship, and political autonomy of most local Indian entities. (2010: 2)

In the context of Mexican indigenous groups, community is realized at the village level and composed of those who participate in local *cargo* systems and *Usos y Costumbres* within a specifically limited geographical area.

The practices of *Usos y Costumbres* and *cargo* are crucial in understanding the operation of ecotourism projects in Oaxacan indigenous communities. Participatory democracy, consensus decision-making, and the system of mutual obligations and responsibilities for the wellbeing of the community will influence the viability of a tourism project. In Oaxaca, depending on the community’s focus on autonomy, multiple stakeholders can contribute to the implementation of ecotourism projects. While the communities provide labor, cultural assets, and the natural environment, local grassroots organizations often provide a framework that promotes sustainable development, expertise with program development, and training in program implementation. Small amounts of seed money are also provided by the Mexican government for programs that promote ecotourism development and reforestation projects. Past partnerships with larger NGOs and the Mexican government have often ignored local needs, conditions, and cultures, and have reduced community autonomy (Adler 2012). Indigenous communities have become increasingly

suspicious of partnering with NGOs from the United States because of negative consequences from outside influences, such as increased individualism, profit motivation, loss of internal markets, and compromised ethnic identities (Adler 2012; Mawdsley et al. 2002; Roberts et al. 2005). More recently, organizational alliances, particularly those at the grassroots level, are recognizing local voices aiming to preserve indigenous traditions in order to create resilient communities and honor their cultural and natural heritages.

Methodology and Findings

Methodology

This exploratory research was part of a larger project investigating community involvement in sustainable development projects in Oaxaca. It utilized qualitative data collection, including project document review, semistructured interviews with key stakeholders, and participant observation in the communities, to assess the experiences of two indigenous communities with ecotourism project development. The goal was to build a conceptual model describing the processes that increase the success of ecotourism projects in indigenous communities.

The research was conducted in two communities in the mountainous interior of Oaxaca in the summer months of 2008. One community had a successful ecotourism project, while the other community's ecotourism project was in the initial stages of design. We selected these communities because they were indigenous, governed by *Usos y Costumbres*, and situated in a similarly appealing natural terrain suited to ecotourism development. We gained entrance to one community through their ecotourism office in Oaxaca City; the other community required that we be escorted there by someone already known to them, to be introduced to the community leaders before we were allowed to stay. Respondents were chosen through convenience sampling in terms of their expertise as participants in their community's tourism projects. We conducted 11 interviews with community members, including those directly involved in ecotourism projects and those indirectly involved, such as restaurant owners, shop keepers, and other community members encountered in the course

of the research project. We also interviewed 19 staff members from development NGOs that were active in the region.

The interviews varied in length from one to three hours. Two note-takers recorded respondents' answers, and the two resultant transcripts were later cross-referenced to ensure reliability and completeness. The interviews were conducted in Spanish with simultaneous English translation, and verbal consent was obtained from each interview participant. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions regarding respondents' assessments of the projects (e.g., goals, successes, problems, decision-making, and work assignments), and various characteristics of the projects (e.g., history, size, funding, alliances, and operations). The transcriptions were examined for statements about respondents' perceptions of the nature and success of the projects, as well as the degree the communities felt in control. Any documentation provided by the community, such as pamphlets, calendars, and mission statements, offered general information about the projects. Participant observation of the ecotourism projects provided the context for the interview data. We participated in events and activities available to tourists in the communities, including booking trips, taking guided hikes, sleeping in community accommodations, and interacting with community members.

One of the limitations of our research was that it only included two communities. However, our main purpose was to explore the community characteristics and dynamics conducive to project viability. Thus, we were able to construct a model that can be tested by larger-scale studies. It was also not possible to interview all participants privately. This was because of cultural expectations that one individual could not accurately speak on behalf of their community, a historically problematic assumption of Western surveying and ethnographic techniques. Rather, there was almost always one or more additional community members present during interviews and focus groups who did not speak or answer questions, but simply observed the interview process, often taking notes about the interview and the researchers. In only two interviews was it possible to gain private access to a respondent's answers; a young woman who worked an office that provided services to tourists seeking an ecotourism experience and the executive director of an NGO. Furthermore, what could be termed

“observer effects” on responses to questions about ecotourism must be considered. Particularly in the community with a ecotourism project still in its preliminary stages, it is unclear whether the researchers’ presence in the community asking about the project sparked more enthusiasm for it. Respondents answered questions as though there was no such ecotourism project, but were willing to give researchers an “ecotour” experience upon our arrival, indicating that they did in fact have some sort of project, however informal or limited in scope.

Findings

In both communities, the ecotourism projects could be characterized as community, for-profit ventures in that they were community-run projects with the goal of increasing the wealth of direct participants and of the community as a whole. Both communities also utilized the governance principles of *Usos y Costumbres* to make community decisions and to manage their productive projects, including ecotourism and sustainable forestry. Finally, both communities utilized a workforce for their projects that was a combination of paid labor and both paid and unpaid *cargos*; work in the projects was distributed via *Usos y Costumbres*.

Community A

At the time of study, Community A had about 1,000 residents and was part of a regional ecotourism collective composed of five communities located in the Sierra Norte Mountains, about a two-hour bus ride from Oaxaca City. The collective received approximately 7,000 tourists a year, making it one of the largest ecotourism ventures in the state. The number of tourists has steadily increased since the collective’s inception in 1996, when the community only received 20 tourists. A young woman working in the Oaxaca City office for the project described the project’s inception:

Two people from Oaxaca City, who worked in ecotourism, visited the Sierra and made a proposition to talk to people in the villages and explain that ecotourism was good work. In 1996, one community developed the first project, with help from the Secretary of Tourism to establish cabins. If the tourism there was

profitable the Secretary said he would continue with the other villages.

Funding for the initial phase of the project was provided by both the national Secretary of Tourism and a Canadian NGO. Ongoing financing for expansion of the project came from the Mexican government and from the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI). The CDI approves community proposals for project expansion and then provides grants to the community. Assistance and funds are also provided by the state forestry agency, Comisión Nacional Forestal.

Each community in the collective had at least five people working in ecotourism-related activities, including administrative personnel, cleaners, cooks, and guides. Three individuals coordinated activities across all five communities, and also oversaw other productive projects, such as the bottling of drinking water, preparing dried fruit, furniture-making, and sustainable forestry. The division of labor among the workers was along traditional gender lines: only two of the administrators were women, and both were in secretarial rather than leadership positions. Most of the cooks and cleaners for tourist cabins were women, and half of the guides were women. In general, recruitment to work in the ecotourism project as a paid staff member went through the *cargo* system. This community system provided unpaid labor for the projects, and also helped the project adjust labor supply to seasonal demands for work. However, this traditional system of community labor is becoming less popular with younger generations. The young female office worker reported:

Some [of the workers] have a salary; others work as part of *cargo*. In the high season, we work all day. When it's down, we take a rest. In the high season, there is full-time employment, but in the low season it is part time work...These [jobs] are *cargo*. The community votes on who will work them. When there's no tourism, there's no pay. But in the high season, [workers] get paid even if they started as *cargo*. All the guides and cleaners are local to the community they work in. Before it was all *cargo*, no pay. But now, some don't want to do *cargo* so they need the

incentive of pay. Some like to do it; they receive *cargo*, but others... Yes, younger people want pay.

The rapid growth and international reputation that the involved communities have built for the project are indicators of success. The same office worker stated: "There are various [ecotourism] organizations, but ours is the most recommended." Additionally, the project appears in both international and national tourist guide books. According to the office worker, cooperation among communities is also considered an advantage: "Because there are five communities involved in the project, if tourists want a service not found in one community they can go to another. Maybe one day he wants to walk, the next to ride a horse or bicycle, no problem." The office worker also said problems within the project were often addressed communally at assemblies: "We have to work together to solve problems because we can't separate ourselves." As an example of community problem solving, another female respondent directly involved in providing tourist services in the community noted that one problem is a tree parasite that has harmed the forest, leaving many trees unhealthy. To control the spread of the plague, infected trees are burned rather than sold, so as not to spread the disease to other parts of the state.

Tourists to the community originate from Australia, Europe, the United States, and Canada, but also include domestic travelers from Mexico. Foreigners account for approximately 60 percent of the tourists. Tourists from Europe sometimes arrive in groups of 20 to 30 at a time, often based on online reservations. Such group reservations require a deposit of 50 percent, which goes directly to the community where the reservation was made. The ecotourism collective is also reaching out to other groups, as noted by the female office worker:

We are connected to almost every travel agency in Oaxaca. We are also connected to national and international travel agencies. We have ties to travel agencies in Chiapas, in other parts of Mexico, in the U.S., in France, Denmark, and the U.K. We have contacts on the coast for ecotourism in Oaxaca, but we only coordinate with other community-based organizations.

The project uses these connections, as well as tourism guidebooks and the Internet, to attract international tourists. Services and activities include guided hikes, birding and botanical excursions, guest cabins, horseback riding, mountain biking, and annual festivals. The project aims to encourage growth of ecotourism in the area by improving services and increasing recommendations and coverage in travel guides, ultimately increasing international visibility. Interview respondents considered ecotourism a stable source of income for the community, but noted that protection from tourism's negative environmental impacts is vital to the continued success of the project. According to our female guide, "Preservation is very important... We don't want people to walk off trails because the plants' roots are established." The trails used by tourists are well-maintained and free of litter thanks to a collective, and unpaid, effort by women of the community.

Community B

In contrast to Community A, Community B is situated in a remote location, about a four-hour drive from Oaxaca City in the Sierra Norte Mountains. At the time of the study, Community B was still in the preliminary stages of implementing an ecotourism project. Lack of convenient accessibility by bus or from the highway due to unpaved roads necessitated private transportation by four-wheel drive vehicle. The primary productive project of this community was sustainable forestry. The ecotourism project remained in the planning stage, mainly because of the community's inaccessibility to tourists who did not know someone through which they could gain entry. Upon arrival to the town of about 1,400 inhabitants, tourists had to present themselves to the town administrators, who held their positions through *cargo*, and secure permission for visitation and by paying a fee. Ecotourist visits to the community occur sporadically and amount to what respondents characterized as "a few groups per year."

Community-controlled, sustainable logging began in this area in the early 1990s, after the community was able to expel an outside company that did not apply reforestation principles. This provided the opportunity to apply principles of sustainability to the logging operation, as well as to ensure that revenues generated

through the industry stayed in the community. As one respondent explained, a man in their 50s, explained:

We have a long history. There was a big company... that logged here. No money came into the community and they did not replant. People in the community organized and expelled the company. Then we started to think about how we can create new projects that benefit our community.

Another respondent from the same community, also a man in his 50s, explained it this way:

Reforestation started 17 years ago. The community entered into organization with four other communities, Zapotecas and Chinantecas, and joined [a forestry union]. The community looked for a good union to give better treatment to the mountains. Because before there was no good treatment. The community wanted to give the mountains a better treatment.

Community goals included the expansion of forestry and ecotourism projects. Overall, the community wanted to increase productive projects to improve their economic wellbeing. Their strategy for expansion was to emulate the examples of successful projects in other communities. As part of the forestry union, they sold raw wood in Oaxaca City to a company that made pressboard. According to a middle-aged male community member, "This is a good strategy because it keeps the money in the state." In order to expand the markets for their wood and finished wood products, they built a woodworking shop, but had recently lost their only carpenter. Although their primary resource is wood, community members were aware that they were located in an area characterized by natural attractions, such as old-growth forests, cloud forests, and waterfalls. The community was considering several possible avenues for increasing ecotourism in their area, such as building cabins, improving trails, and installing a zip line near one of the waterfalls. Our male hiking guide stated:

Ecotourism is a good idea. It would bring more jobs and more animation to the community. This community has many beautiful things, so it should have ecotourism, but it's other communities that have it even though we have more attractions.

A lot of people don't value this community enough, but it should have ecotourism above all others.

Nevertheless, community members recognized that in order to expand ecotourism, they must first establish the necessary infrastructure, such as roads, cabins, and trails, as well as organize a series of smaller projects to facilitate hosting more tourists to the area. The guide explained:

We need to advance ecotourism. We are waiting for another project to help fix the trails, but now resources are too low to cover all that we would need. Another project would help advance ecotourism, but now it is the rainy season. Reforestation makes ecotourism possible. First, we have to fix the area so that visitors have access, but first fix the paths.

To this point, while we went on a guided hike on the mountain, one of our associates fell when part of the poorly maintained trail gave way. The trail traversed virgin cloud forest and led to a pre-Columbian road that ran along the ridge of the mountain. Therefore, our guide felt that the first step for expanding ecotourism should be to improve the trails.

At the time of the study, Community B did not have ecotourism partnerships with other communities, but they did have permission to collect the entrance fees to the nearby national forest. The sustainable forestry union to which they belonged also included five other communities in the region. Recruitment to both the forestry and ecotourism projects was through both *Usos y Costumbres* and *cargo*, and was open to anyone in the community who had time. There were seasonal variations in the labor needed for the existing logging and reforestation projects, and there were three full-time employees in the administrative office of the logging project. Because the formal ecotourism project was still in the planning stages, employment in that field was more sporadic. Both projects were funded entirely by the community through proceeds from their logging project.

Women and men were equally represented in the reforestation aspect of the sustainable logging project, but within gendered spaces. Women primarily stayed in the greenhouse, while men typically planted saplings on the mountain. Interviews with the

women who ran the only restaurant in the community reinforced this assessment. They stated that women were responsible for the clean appearance of the community, and for gathering and preparing food. These are important contributions if the community wants to host more tourists.

The perceived successes of the productive projects in this community were related primarily to concerns for environmental wellbeing, as the guide elaborated:

Our success is the trees. The best treatment for the mountain. Not to cut everything down but to fix it. To plant back what we take... so that the resources aren't used up.

However, the logging project had not brought as many economic resources to the community as participants felt it could if expansion continued. As in Community A, tree parasites were a problem. Other challenges were that the community viewed itself as less successful than other communities, and the goals for development were unclear. Although the Mexican government provided technical advice for managing the sustainable logging project, the information was not disseminated to the entire community. Therefore, the village not only lacked the technical expertise to make pressboard within the community, but at the time of study, they also lacked a carpenter to produce finished pieces. Similarly, the community did not utilize the Internet for advertising their ecotourism venture. Community members were surprised to learn that their sustainable logging initiative had been profiled on the Internet.

The attractions offered to ecotourists included diverse ecological regions within a short distance of the community, including highland virgin and cloud forests, multiple waterfalls, sites of archeological interest, and meadows with horses. Potential activities included guided hikes, mountain biking, and horseback riding. The community had very few promotional brochures, but did have a small desk calendar featuring scenes of beauty near the community that may be visited by tourists. Community members generally had a positive view of tourism, but recognized that to be successful, they needed to expand their ecotourism project. Our guide stated:

...we need to invest in ecotourism, to make the rooms better, construct cabins. We need restaurants, cars, T-shirts, postcards, and roads. We need to train the young people in tourism and language and as guides, to keep them here...Ecotourism is a good thing. You saw it too. It's good to start. It would be really good to start it. We will start it after the rains. When you visit next time, you'll see the improvement.

Although tourists to the community had access to sleeping accommodations, a restaurant, and a guide for hiking, accommodations had no indoor plumbing, unfinished walls, dangerous electrical wiring, and problematic access. At the time the community was not prepared to accept a large number of tourists seeking an ecotourism experience. For example, the only restaurant did not treat vegetables for possible food-borne illnesses, and thus was not prepared for international tourists. The community retained complete control of access to their location at the expense of exclusion from networks and coalitions that could be useful in establishing the project. Although the community benefited from alliances that supported their sustainable forestry project, they did not have such profitable relationships with partners for their ecotourism project.

A Model for Ecotourism Viability

Based on our research, we developed the conceptual model of ecotourism viability depicted in Figure 1. The starting point of our model was the hypothesis that in addition to community control of projects, connectivity to other organizations and communities is essential to project viability. Successful projects ultimately facilitate sustainable development, environmental protection, and empowerment of indigenous communities. The conceptual model shows that location, available resources available infrastructure, and involvement in other projects are essential for the success of ecotourism projects. Additionally, communities need access to potential tourists, alliances with NGOs and other community networks, and external logistical and financial support. Community-initiated development projects can benefit from the expertise of NGOs, but the decision-making power must be retained by the indigenous communities in which projects unfold. There appears to be a tradeoff between community autonomy and

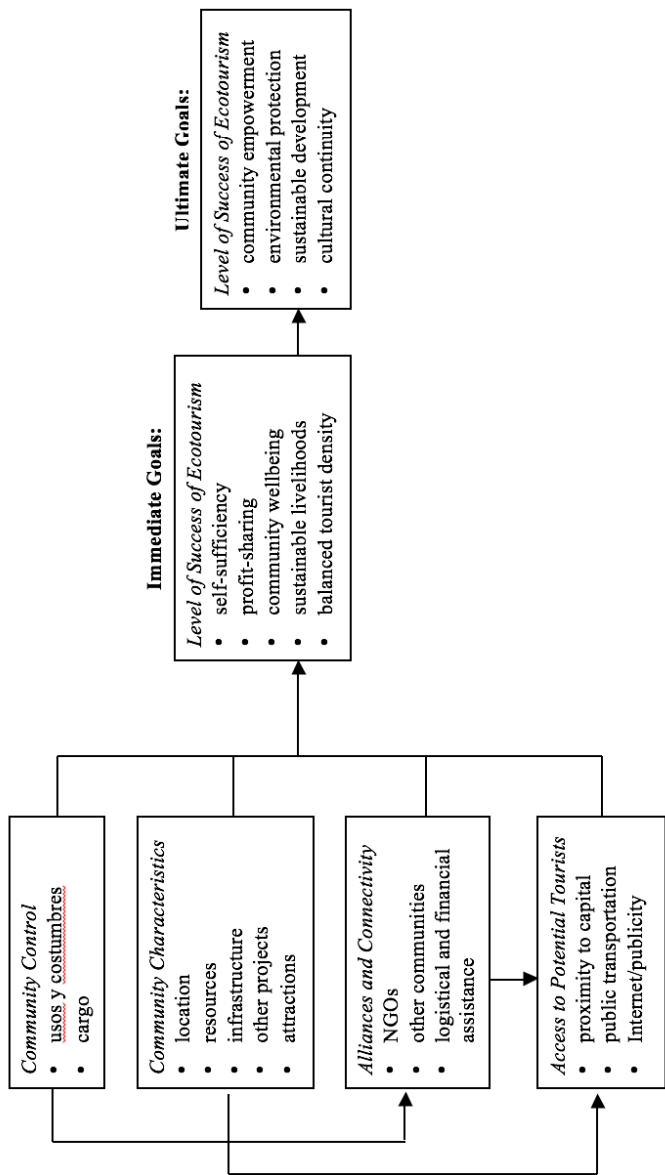


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Ecotourism as a Sustainable Development Strategy

the benefits associated with inclusion in the regional network of organizations and communities. Autonomy can lead to isolation and exclusion when it is not balanced with coalition-building and cooperation with partners for the purpose of generating project resources. These variables, combined with a community's own natural resources and successful land stewardship practices, including reforestation and other sustainable economic projects, determine the success of ecotourism projects, as reflected in the number of tourists, recommendations, and the overall benefit to the community. The benefits of increased economic wellbeing should be distributed equitably throughout the community, but this can be curtailed by the gendered spaces of community-based productive projects.

Productive projects, including ecotourism, encourage community members to stay in their communities rather than migrate because such projects provide jobs. The profit-sharing components and community decision-making apparatus of participatory management utilizing *Usos y Costumbres* help to ensure that ecotourism projects benefit the entire community in which they are located, and not simply those who directly take part in promoting or conducting tourist activities. The *cargo* system is also useful in initiating programs, because it allows for lower startup costs if community members are committed to the project. Ecotourism has a role to play in achieving the goals of sustainable development, but only if it is conducted in the context of other community-controlled projects that are embedded in a network of assisting local organizations. Although community control of projects remains the best mechanism to ensure that economic benefits remain with the visited community, a project's success also relates to the community's ability to balance autonomy and connectivity.

Discussion and Conclusion

This exploratory research examined how various community characteristics relate to the implementation and success of ecotourism projects in two Oaxacan communities. Of particular interest were the role of community control in terms of *Usos y Costumbres* and *cargo* practices, and community connectivity to the outside, as both of these characteristics relate to the viability of

ecotourism projects. Our research indicates that although the two communities had similar cultural practices and extensive natural resources, their ecotourism projects differed significantly.

In Community A, participants considered ecotourism a very successful, collective project, which continued to expand every year. The community directly managed and administered the project through *Usos y Costumbres* and *cargo*, made extensive use of coalitions with other communities and organizations, and received continued governmental and NGO financial support. Specific reasons for success included the accessibility of the community from the state capital via bus lines and tourist vans, effective public relations and Internet advertising, a variety of available ecotourism activities, and continued financial support for expansion. An increasing number of annual tourists, travel agency recommendations, and features on the community in travel guides were considered signs of success by those involved in the project.

In contrast, while members in Community B would have welcomed more ecotourism, it was not yet a viable project. The project remained in the planning stages, and efforts to expand ecotourism were hampered by a lack of practical management training, minimal coalitions with other communities that had established ecotourism, and very limited financial support. Reasons for the slow progress included difficult access to the community from Oaxaca City, a lack of public relations and Internet advertising, undeveloped ecotourism activities, and a lack of appropriate accommodations. The remoteness of the community in terms of geographic inaccessibility and lack of coalitions with other communities had prevented the development of a sustainable ecotourism project. In this context, it appears that community autonomy and control translated into isolation and exclusion, which are not conducive to establishing a sustainable project.

Overall, it is not natural resources or community control that determine the success of a project, but rather a community's position within a network of other organizations that can provide assistance and experience. Resources such as transportation infrastructure to overcome remoteness, and a technical connection to the outside for public relations and advertising are necessary. Oaxacan communities governed by *Usos y Costumbres* and *cargo* are particularly well-situated to create community-controlled,

productive projects for ecotourism because community decision-making mechanisms and access to low-cost labor are already in place. It appears that community control is important in the management of a project, but in order to successfully implement a project, cooperation with outside organizations is necessary.

When developing ecotourism projects, a community must protect its way of life and its natural environment, while also reaching beyond its boundaries to connect with the outside world via infrastructure and technology. Additionally, the role of grassroots NGOs and fellow communities in facilitating project development is crucial to project expansion and success. Although previous literature shows community collaboration with NGOs as problematic, the loss of community control is not inevitable. Grassroots organizations that understand and respect local conditions can encourage the use of local governing techniques to create community-initiated projects. Communities that have successfully established systems of operating their ecotourism projects can be used as models, and lead to mutually beneficial cooperations and referrals. In addition, negative tourist impact can be mitigated by community control. For example, the number of cabins a community decides to construct limits the number of tourists to the area.

Future research into how Oaxacan community decision-making processes affect ecotourism projects should seek to observe the assemblies where key decisions are made. We had to rely on participants' accounts of how such decision-making practices are conducted because outsiders have no access to assemblies. Interestingly, we found that the role of women in the projects appears important, but is not always visible or credited. It seems that women are less involved with decisions made at governing assemblies and project leadership, but have important roles in performing *cargo*. Future research should explore the gender dimension of ecotourism project management and success.

We hope that researchers and practitioners interested in improving the viability of projects geared toward sustainable livelihoods in indigenous communities find our model useful. We believe the model can guide grassroots efforts to find a balance between community autonomy and network integration based on local needs and conditions. We refrain from making specific

recommendations because our results are based on a small exploratory study, and each community faces a unique constellation of conditions. Ultimately, community members must make informed decisions about how to proceed with projects based on their own needs, visions, and available resources. A larger-scale study would be conducive to developing key guidelines and suggestions for struggling communities.

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FEATURED ARTICLE AND
INTERVIEWS ON
SOCIAL INEQUALITY

INVITED 2011 CARROLL D.
CLARK LECTURER
AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

INTERVIEW WITH LANE KENWORTHY

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY:

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University of Kansas

ANDREA GOMEZ-CERVANTES

University of Kansas

Dr. Lane Kenworthy is Professor of Sociology and Yankelovich Chair in Social Thought at the University of California-San Diego and Professor of Sociology and Political Science at The University of Arizona. His work focuses on the causes and consequences of living standards, poverty, inequality, mobility, employment, economic growth, social policy, taxes, public opinion, and politics in the United States and other affluent countries. Dr. Kenworthy joined us to talk about public sociology, income inequality, and voting.

CARRIE: Thank you for allowing us to do this interview and to publish it in STAR.

You've written articles for journals that aim to present academic research in more readable, down-to-earth format. You've also done radio interviews and a blog called "Consider the Evidence." Could you talk more about these public sociology endeavors? Why do you think it's important to do this?

KENWORTHY: I do it because many of the issues I study and the research questions I try to answer are relevant to policy debates and likely to be of interest to the public. That's not true for every social scientist, however, so I don't think it's vital for academics to do this. I embrace public sociology, but it's not something all sociologists should feel compelled to do.

CARRIE: Okay. Is there any particular advice you might give to someone else interested in doing that?

KENWORTHY: My blog has been very helpful. A blog allows you to write for a popular audience instantly and often. Most blogs don't reach a wide audience. But some do, and others get their posts picked up by an aggregator—a person or website that pulls together what they see as best on the web in the area they focus on—or on social media. Even if the audience is small, writing blog posts gives you a chance to clarify your thinking and improve your writing. For most of us, writing is a difficult skill, so the more practice you get, the better. And you can publish your thoughts in real time, instead of having to wait weeks or months or years to get into print.

ANDREA: You have conducted a lot of research on income inequality across affluent nations. In this line of research the U.S. stands out as an outlier in terms of high-income inequality and meager social welfare options. How do you think the racial make up of the U.S. has led the country to be so different in this regard?

KENWORTHY: One view is that race is the crux of what separates the United States from most western European countries in terms of the size and scope of our public safety net. The idea is that racial difference—including perceptions that most poor people are nonwhite—makes many Americans less receptive to the notion of a generous welfare state. I do think that's part of the story.

But I don't see public opinion as having been a major determinant of the types of social programs put in place. In my view, the creation and expansion of social programs has had more to do with the strength of organized interest groups and the composition of political parties. It's not an accident that the New Deal was put in place in the 1930s when the economy was falling apart, labor was on the rise, unions were organizing, and the Democrats had the presidency and large majorities in both houses of Congress. It's not that the American public was pushing strongly for the creation of social security or unemployment insurance. There was support, but I think what really drove it was a moment in the politics. So policies get enacted at opportune moments, and if they're effective public opinion comes around and supports them and makes it harder to take them away. The same is true if we want to understand differences across countries. It's not

that in the 1930s Swedes were much more in favor of generous encompassing social programs than Americans were. The key difference is that unions were a lot stronger and Sweden's left party had a different orientation than our Democrats. Now, many years later, we observe big differences in public opinion between Swedes and Americans, but those are more the result than the cause of the differences in social programs.

Another way race may have mattered has to do with the strength of the union movement. There is a very strong association across rich countries between the organization and the centralization of unions and the generosity of social programs. Here in the United States the racial divide was a significant obstacle to union organizing.

Finally, race had another indirect effect via the shape of the political parties. The Democratic Party for a long time was an odd combination of liberals in the northern and western parts of the country and conservatives in the south. This was a legacy of the Civil War and race. When the opportunity arose in the 1930s to put in place a bunch of important pillars of the public safety net, a lot of stuff got done. It was certainly a progressive moment in our history. But the shape and generosity of the programs were limited because of the southern Democrats. The same sort of thing happened in the 1960s, the next stage of major welfare state expansion.

CARRIE: This question comes from a student who couldn't be here today. His name is Kevin McCannon, and he cited you often in his most recent area exam. His question is in reference to a 2010 article you wrote with Andrew Gelman and Yu-Sung Su. Kevin asks: in a recent article you and your fellow researchers found no clear relation between class-based voting and income inequality. However, in this article your analyses are for years prior to the Great Recession, the recent national debt debate, and the newest proposal from the White House to increase taxes on millionaires - a proposal Republicans are labeling "class warfare." Do you think that in this new context, one in which inequalities are seemingly more transparent, income inequalities may be more of a factor in partisan voting than before?

KENWORTHY: That's possible, though we won't have the data to look at this for a while. On the other hand, historically the public opinion survey data suggest that while Americans think there's too much income inequality, it's way down the list of their top concerns. They're much more interested in healthy economic growth and in income security. They're interested in programs that do happen to reduce inequality but in their view are far more useful for providing security and also opportunity. So although it wouldn't surprise me if inequality, at least for this period and perhaps for a little while afterwards, does have more of an effect on partisan voting, it also wouldn't surprise me if it doesn't.

CARRIE: What social and economic policies do you think are needed right now in the U.S. to return to more just levels of income inequality? And which do you think are actually feasible in the current political climate?

KENWORTHY: The feasibility part is very difficult, because Republicans in Congress have settled on a strategy of simply opposing everything that the Obama administration and Democrats want to do. The 2009 economic stimulus package included some things that will reduce income inequality a little, like a small increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit. The 2010 healthcare reform includes a higher tax on the richest to help fund Medicare, but otherwise it won't have much impact on measured income inequality, because the value of healthcare isn't included in the standard income data.

What sorts of things could be done in the absence of intense opposition from Republicans? There are two aspects of income inequality in the U.S. over the last generation. One is the rich—the top 1%—pulling away from everybody else. The other is widening inequality within the bottom 99%, the defining feature of which has been slow income growth for households in the middle and below.

One common proposal is a salary cap for people at the top. But there are practical difficulties. For CEOs, a lot of pay comes from stock options, which aren't as easy to limit as salary. And they might just shift compensation into nonmonetary forms; the firm can buy the CEO vacation homes, pay for their kids' college

tuition, buy them a private jet to fly around, and so on. There's also the problem of how to justify a cap on pay for CEOs but not for people in finance, like hedge fund managers, or for entrepreneurs and athletes and entertainers. A better strategy, I'd say, is to increase taxation of those at the top. My preference would be to go back to late 1990s levels, see how that works, and then maybe go a little higher—do it incrementally, a gradual trial-and-error-type approach.

To address slow income growth for households in the middle and below, I favor a couple of things. One is expansion of government services—early education, access to low-cost college, truly universal healthcare, job training and placement assistance, personalized care for those with special needs, access to broadband, public transportation, improved roads and bike paths, parks and greenspace, and more. The value of services doesn't show up as income, so this doesn't reduce measured income inequality, but it does reduce inequality of living standards.

For actual incomes, the minimum wage and the Earned Income Tax Credit are key. Many on the left would like to see stronger unions. Historically, unions have been a major force for improving wages and household incomes in the U.S., and their comparative weakness here is a big part of the reason why the U.S. wage patterns and welfare state generosity differ from Western European countries. But it's very unlikely that unions can regain anything like the strength they used to have, so we have to look to the minimum wage and the Earned Income Tax Credit. I'd like to see the EITC expanded into the middle class.

CARRIE: We just have one more question. This also comes from Kevin and in reference to that 2010 article. He asks: if income inequality is not a clear predictor of partisan voting, where should sociologists be looking for a stronger relationship? You mention education and religion in your 2010 article. Could you elaborate on that?

KENWORTHY: The 2010 article had a specific finding about the effect of income inequality on partisan voting. Poor Americans are much more likely to vote Democratic than Republican. Income is more important than social issues as a predictor of voting behavior

of poor versus rich Americans. So we asked: Has the gap in party preference between the poor and the rich widened even further as their incomes have grown further apart? Has rising income inequality made the rich even more likely to vote Republican and the poor even more likely to vote Democratic? We don't find much evidence that that has been the case.

We say part of the reason for this is education and part of it is religion. But I want to emphasize that income remains a very good predictor of which party a person votes for. It's just that income's influence doesn't seem to have increased as the gap in incomes has widened.

ANDREA: Do you think it has to do as well with the political campaign—how, for example, Obama's campaign was aiming towards Latinos and he would talk to Latino artists, who then would campaign for him? Do you think this has an influence at all?

KENWORTHY: I think its effect is relatively small. The policies that the parties espouse and enact tend to have a much bigger impact.

INVITED 2012 CARROLL D.
CLARK LECTURER
AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

INTERVIEW WITH MARY C. WATERS

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY:

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KEVIN MCCANNON
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Dr. Mary C. Waters is an Amy Zuckerman professor of Sociology at Harvard University who specializes in race, ethnicity, and immigration.

ALVORD: Mary Waters, thank you so much for taking the time to be here with us today. We really, really appreciate it.

WATERS: Well I'm very happy to be here.

ALVORD: You have enjoyed quite a distinguished career so far at Harvard and you've really been known so far with your work in race and ethnicity and immigration. Before your lecture yesterday at the Clark lecture you discussed more recent work that you've been doing, you've been involved with—which is taking a somewhat different direction which you acknowledge—I was wondering if you wouldn't mind telling us a little bit about that project and how it fits and departs from your wider research agenda.

WATERS: Most of my work has been on racial and ethnic identity, and immigration and the integration of the children of immigrants into society. And I—I don't really restrict myself to any one area of research but as I was doing work on the children of immigrants, I got invited to be on this McArthur research network on the transition to adulthood. And they were looking at young adults around the country and they wanted someone who knew about the children of immigrants and young adulthood. And so, I spent ten years on this interdisciplinary

research network thinking about how young adulthood has changed, and one of the ways in which we were thinking about it was about community colleges. And some economists on the panel were doing a study of what keeps people in community colleges, and one of the places where they were doing an experiment (actually, where they were paying people for good grades) was in New Orleans.

And when the hurricane hit, we had a meeting right after that, and they said, ‘Oh, well, we’re going to have to get rid of our study because of the hurricane we won’t be able to follow people.’ And I knew that we had health data and all kinds of data on social support, et cetera, so I just said ‘We should really keep following these people and find out what happened.’ And while it’s taken me into disaster research and health research, and things I hadn’t really done before, there’s some continuities in that the people we were following were all African-Americans, and they’re moving into new neighborhoods with Latinos and whites for the first time so there’s the issue of intergroup relations which has been central to my work. And then also they’re all young adults—so the question of how they’re navigating their adulthood is another continuity. But one of the fun things about being a sociologist is that almost anything is fodder for our interest, and a great thing is that you can just follow your interests and when a research opportunity comes up, you know you’re not limited and you can learn about new things, and that’s also really exciting. So moving into a new field, you meet new people, you get exposed to new ideas, you learn about things, so this book—continuities and fresh challenges, so I like that.

ALVORD: I wonder: did you face any sort of challenges, and sort of picking up someone else’s research project, like kind of midway through?

WATERS: Well, there was a big challenge which is that we had to get human subjects IRB approval to be able to go back to the people who had signed up for a longitudinal study of educational outcomes to change it to be about the impact of hurricane. And I was working with people from Princeton, I was at Harvard, there was also somebody at U-Mass Boston, and at Tulane, and also the

survey research firm, and the original study was out of MDRC—which is a research firm that does experimental research, field experiments. So *all* of those different IRBs had to approve this research. And, the original IRB that had approved it (at MDRC) was very skeptical about whether or not we should be allowed to do this. And the issue was whether it would—whether it was violating the agreement we had given to people at the beginning, and also whether or not it would upset people too much to talk about the hurricane. And we made the argument that people would want to talk about something like this. And there was the ongoing study of the educational outcomes so we wanted to know whether people reenrolled, and so we were going to continue the original thing. We are, actually, one of my graduate students is writing her dissertation on community colleges and how people navigate them. So we are continuing the original part but we made the argument that it would be crazy to call these people and not mention Katrina. They are scattered all over the country, their community college was under water, so they agreed to it, eventually, and people have been very happy to be asked about this. And in fact, they just say, ‘You know, we’re so glad that we had somebody to talk to about this experience.’

ALVORD: Did you face any unique challenges, or what were sort of the pros and cons or experiences of working on such a large interdisciplinary team?

WATERS: It’s been a really interesting experience because we have, we all bring our different perspectives, and also even just vocabulary, so when we had to think, you know, about running analyses on the survey data, the economists would do it one way, the psychologists another, and the sociologists.... ‘I want to do a multiple regression.’ ‘No, we should do an ANOVA,’ and we would have to argue about what statistical approach was right. And so, it was very interesting because you get to examine your sort of reflex of just... ideas that you don’t even think through about why you do things in a particular way. But generally, we’ve all worked really well together. We have lab meetings where we bring together graduate students from the different projects. My main collaborator Jean Rhodes is at U-Mass Boston, so we’re at least in

the same city. And then we Skype in, or we conference call in, our collaborators—Beth Fussell who is now at Tulane for the year and is usually at Washington State. And then we had a big disruption because the main economist we were working with—Christina Paxson—just got named president of Brown University. So she had to come off the project because she's not going to have time to do that and still be president of a university. We brought on another economist who had started out with us but she had gone to work in The White House for two years in the President's council of economic advisors so Cecelia Rouse came back out of The White House right when Christina was going to Brown. So, we've had comings and goings.

MCCANNON: I wanted to get more from you with this—since the project started really before the hurricane hit, this is sort of an accident that you were able to take advantage of. And thinking about it from that point of view, could you talk a little bit more about what that really meant for the project? To say, 'Hey, wow, this big event just happened.' How do you handle that? What did you and the research team do when that happened? Did you approach it—how did you think about that?

WATERS: Well, the main thing that got us thinking about it was that, we had asked a lot of questions because the original question was whether education—more education—influenced people's mental and physical health. So we had asked all these questions about mental and physical health, and we had asked questions about social support, for trying to understand if people had the social support they needed to finish college. So we had asked all these questions which had incredible meaning for a hurricane. So when we thought about going back, we realized that we could ask the same questions again and get an estimate of the effect of the hurricane net of people's previous beliefs and experiences. And that's very rare in disaster studies. So we knew that we were sitting on data that was very important. And so immediately, we thought about how we would get funding to find these people—and we were really curious as whether or not we would be able to, we really weren't sure because the community college was under water and closed down. Nobody knew where anybody was. But in

those first few months, the National Science Foundation had money available for studying disaster, and it was a quick turnaround. So if you got an application in fast, you could get some money. So we wrote up an application very quickly, and we got some money also from the McArthur Foundation, that was sponsoring our research network. So between those two we were able to get the survey research firm to immediately start looking for people. And most of the phone numbers didn't work, but we did have their social security number and what we learned was that if you apply for a job, if you apply to rent, or a place to live, you pop into these databases that the survey research firm can find.

So, we also sent people out to—basically once New Orleans started to open back up—to look at houses and see were they under water, were they abandoned, were people still there. We asked neighbors, 'Do you know where the people who used to live here might be?' But people had also given us the phone numbers, you know, as usual in a longitudinal study, we asked 'Is there anybody who would know where you were?' But the problem was of course, was that everybody in New Orleans was displaced. So if you couldn't find this person, you also couldn't find their mother or their sister or their best friend who they had given us the numbers of. Although some of the people had cellphones so we were able to find them, wherever they were.

MCCANNON: Interesting. That actually led me to another question that came about the interdisciplinary research and you mentioned specifically, "okay, now we have this opportunity we really need the funding to do this." Could you tell a little bit about your experience with putting together a grant proposal really almost on the fly, if you will, but within an interdisciplinary [team]. Because it is one thing to be a single P.I., and write a grant proposal. But then to have all these different individuals and especially something that has a real quick deadline. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

WATERS: Chris Paxson, who was the economist who was at Princeton and is now at Brown was the lead P.I. and she was just amazing and organized all of these different sub-entities. So I had my sub-grant at Harvard, and there was another sub-grant

at U-Mass, and so we all had to work together to put this together and it was a big logistical issue. Not so much the interdisciplinarity part of it, but just having so many institutions involved. Because they all have, your grants person, and you have to get your budgets, and you all have different rules about how much you pay people, and all those kinds of things.

MCCANNON: Right.

WATERS: So it was a very big undertaking to do that. After NSF and the McArthur Foundation, we applied to the National Institute of Health. So that's where we got the five year funding to do the follow-ups and follow people over time. And that was a huge grant. We're in the last year of that grant so now we're gearing up to reapply for another five years of funding.

ALVORD: One thing that you mentioned at the end of your lecture yesterday was sort of the policy implications for cities, local governments, dealing with disasters. You know you mentioned that climate change disaster is much more likely to occur. So I just wonder if you could talk a little about the policy implications that you would like to see come out of your research.

WATERS: Well, one of them is just the idea that you need to have preparation and thinking about what's going to happen when a disaster hits—which I think is becoming more and more prevalent. It was very clear that New Orleans was completely unprepared for this even though it had been predicted over and over again that this was going to happen. But they were not prepared to evacuate people who didn't have cars. They were not prepared to give the right advice to people.

We found—and actually this has been found in other studies too—that most people who don't evacuate don't do so for selfish reasons, they actually do so for very altruistic reasons. So a lot of the people who didn't evacuate that we interviewed had elderly relatives who they couldn't leave behind, had jobs where they were told by their employers that they should stay. Some of them were maids in downtown hotel rooms—and the usual policy in these hotels was that they would give rooms to employees, so they could

be there. They would stay on higher floors, and when the hurricane was over they would have the workers that they needed even if there's an evacuation. Well these women who were maids in these hotel rooms stayed there, and then when it flooded, the hotels just put them out. And they ended up at the convention center. They brought their families, because that was also the usual policy to bring your family and stay in the hotel rooms. So there were all kinds of really bad decisions that were made in preparation for the hurricane and then there are things that you can find out by following people over time. One of the most amazing findings that we had was the lasting impact of pet loss. So we added this question at the last minute, you know, many of us have pets, dogs, and cats, and we thought 'Well what do you do about this?' We asked a question whether they lost a pet, whether their pet died. And that was a reason that some people gave for not evacuating, was that they couldn't leave behind their dog or their cat. And it turned out that pet loss—especially for people who had low social support before the hurricane—was a lasting cause of depression and anxiety after the hurricane. So people's psychological health was very much damaged by losing their pet—not only because they lost this source of love and support in their lives, but also because they had incredible guilt because they left their pet behind and the pet died. So I mentioned this because this is kind of a simple issue that policymakers I don't really talked, thought about—which is, people won't evacuate because people want to protect their pet, and shelters don't usually take pets. Or if they do, they tell you that you have to bring your pet's vaccination records which, as I pointed out in the talk, it's not like a lot of people have those at their fingertips when a giant hurricane is coming. So I really think that they need to think about that issue for future evacuations.

MCCANNON: I was curious also about that. Some other past research you'd done was with the U.S. Census with the racial categories and the implications for people who identify as multiracial. And I don't know if you could talk a little bit about that—about what that means for sociologists conducting research, particularly if they are using these various large datasets that have very limited racial categories. You know, 'black, white, Hispanic'

that's pretty basic, as well as possibly the implications for people who do identify as multiracial and how these kinds of surveys might impact people's identity, racial identity.

WATERS: Yeah. I had been doing research on ethnic identity and racial identity for a long time and I started out actually, in graduate school. My dissertation, which became the book *Ethnic Options* was really about trying to put together the Census question on ancestry, where people could give more than one answer, and how people thought about that. So I've always been interested in this question, you know, 'What does it mean to be both Irish and Italian?' And then it expanded afterwards, my research, to think about 'What does it mean to have a black ancestry as Jamaican?' And 'What does it mean to be of mixed racial ancestry?'

And because I had done this research on the Census question, I have, you know, worked with people at the Census Bureau, basically since I first got out of graduate school. I've gone to many meetings and I've been on the PAA Census Advisory Board, and I've gone to conferences about how the Census should ask the questions. And how they might change the questions to better capture what people identify with. And it's been fascinating because the people at the Census Bureau are really terrific researchers, very smart, have, you know, do really high-quality research, but they operate in this constraint of being—doing something that's very political. And so, there's this tension between how they see themselves as social scientists trying to measure a very messy concept—race or ethnicity. And then, the kind of meddling, or, you know, pressure from both interest groups who want their numbers to be high, and Senators and Congressmen who have strong beliefs about 'you shouldn't ask this question' or 'you should ask it this particular way.' So the Census race question, for instance, has many, many categories for Asian groups. So it says, 'Are you white, black,' and then it says 'Are you Filipino, Chinese, Guamanian, and a whole long list of categories. Now, no social scientist would design a question that way that has one level of specificity for one group and another level for another group. But there was a Senator who wanted those Asian categories on and at the last minute he exerted his power and got the question changed. And ever since then, the question has just

added categories instead of subtracting them. So it's been really interesting to see how, you know, in a democracy, and there definitely is this idea that the Census belongs to the people and there should be all this political input. And yet, then, people complain that the question doesn't make sense and it's not measuring things properly. So, for instance, the separate question for Hispanics, and for race, so you can't tell the Census on the race question that you are Latino or Hispanic; it's a separate question. And that is something that causes all kinds of problems for the Census Bureau because Latino people look at the race question, they don't see the category that reflects them, they check 'other,' and they write it in. That costs a lot of money for the Census Bureau to actually process because they have to actually, you know, have the machine read it and reassign them to another category. And so they would love to change that. But the tests that they've done show that the number of Latinos in the United States would go down if they did that. So there is a lot of pressure from Latino groups themselves to have a separate question because nobody wants their numbers to go down. So it's been fascinating and it's been fun to be a part of it. I've enjoyed it.

ALVORD: Kind of tying together the race/identity question and the Katrina question, what have sociologists, or what have social scientists learned in particular about race through Katrina?

WATERS: Well there's been some survey research asking blacks and whites in the US whether the response to Katrina by the government, both federal and local, was so bad because the majority of the people who were worse off in Katrina were African American. So they've asked a question, 'Do you think that the government response was not as quick and efficient as it could have been because of race?' And whites saying 'no,' it was just, you know, a failure of government, and blacks, overwhelmingly say, 'oh yes, it was because of racism towards the people who experienced this.' So in one way it still shows you that you have very different perspectives on the same phenomenon across blacks and whites in the US.

There's also the ways in which Katrina, for a very short period of time, but very intensely, showed the intense poverty in New

Orleans. So the people who were on the screens every night when this was on television unfolding in front of Americans' eyes were poor African-Americans. And a lot of people in the United States—some black, but mostly white—had very little knowledge that there were people that were that poor, living in those poor conditions, in our country. And, you know, you would hope that that would have led to more discussion about poverty and about the racial disparities in poverty. And it did a little bit but then the next thing came on CNN and people lost their interest in it. And it faded from view.

ALVORD: I just wonder like, what are the implications then of that for democracy? In a way, so you mentioned how, you know, whites saw it as a failure of government, blacks saw it as another manifestation of oppression and racism. And so how has that—and you touched on it a little bit yesterday—how has that influenced or impacted civic participation, post-Katrina?

WATERS: Among our respondents, we asked about whether the experience of the hurricane and what happened to New Orleans made them want to get more involved in politics or less, and made them more or less likely to vote? And they said it made them more cynical than they were before and less likely to be politically active. Because it became clear—clearer—to them that government didn't really care too much about people like them. So that was kind of discouraging. Completely understandable, but also discouraging because if you are thinking about how you might make changes, you would hope that, you know, civic participation would rise after something like this, where people would say, 'This shouldn't happen again. Let's organize to have better government.' But in a way, the take-home that a lot of the people had was, 'You can't rely on government,' and also, 'Government doesn't care about people like me.' So it doesn't—you know, 'I should invest my energy elsewhere.'

MCCANNON: You know, that's interesting. It makes me think of, sometimes, I guess, sociologists kind of assume that—well in this particular case we can go all the way back to Marx—and well, you are living in X condition. A rational person should be expected to

react in a certain way. You're oppressed, working-class, it is expected that you should want to rise up and be politically active or whatever. So it seems—I know sometimes we kind of go into, at least those of us, graduate students, young scholars, just still learning, that see this, 'Oh, okay, wow, I can see there is a huge problem here. Health care—why aren't more people rallying to do something about it?' And it sort of taps into that a little bit. These assumptions that we kind of approach and think that because people are living in X condition that we expect them to react in Y and when they don't, how do we handle that?

WATERS: Yeah. You know I think that's a reason why we need to do research—both surveys and also ethnographies and in-depth interviews with people—to understand how they understand the particular situation that they're in and how different options either come on the table for them or don't. So why a person would conclude from a particular situation that, you know, they should concentrate on themselves and their own families or they should band together with other people. But you know, the other point that I made in the talk yesterday about the research is that the whole response to Katrina has been very individualized and atomized. And so, individuals apply for money to fix up their houses, and they, individuals are either homeowners or renters and they make a kind of cost-benefit analysis about whether or not they're going to go back and fix up their house and go back to their neighborhood. But what they really are craving is the same group of neighbors and extended family and community that they had before the hurricane. And yet there's no mechanism to have collective action about going back. There are in neighborhoods with a little bit more resources than the neighborhoods that our respondents lived in. So in some of the more middle-class neighborhoods, like Lakeview, people were organized, they were on the internet, they were pressuring the government, to have the whole neighborhood come back. But for a lot of our people who were renters or who were homeowners but did not have insurance because these houses had been paid off and they had belonged to their grandmother or great-grandmother, so they had no need for mortgage insurance. So they didn't have insurance on their houses.

They are very much making individual decisions about whether to come back and feeling very atomized. So it's not surprising to me that people who were kind of left on their own that way would also just respond that government really is not—or collective action is not the way to change their lives but also mainly just to focus on themselves and their immediate family.

ALVORD: You were mentioning how you wanted to sort of continue this Katrina research, and even looking at the children of the mothers that you interviewed. You have a long history of looking at second-generation immigrants. And I wonder, sort of a two-part question: What's the sociological benefit of looking at [the] second-generation, and what kind of similarities or differences are you expecting to find?

WATERS: Well, I think there's a lot of really interesting and exciting interdisciplinary work being done now on poverty and the biological impacts of poverty. So the effects of stress growing up in neighborhoods on children's ability to learn, on the effects of growing up in stressful environments, on people's not only kind of cognitive abilities but also their behavioral attributes and how much they can adapt to new circumstances and regulate their behavior, et cetera. So I think that this is research that's really looking at kind of the biological imprint of social disadvantage. And so, I actually think that looking at the children of Katrina and following them over time when we have such a rich database on their moms and also on the neighborhoods that they've ended up in, that the study can really look at the longitudinal impact of a disaster which can have, I think, repercussions for the next generation. But also, it can look at kind of changes in poverty levels, and the kinds of neighborhoods people live in, and the effect on children. So, it's not *just* a disaster study at this point, but it is also kind of a longitudinal study of social changes for these mothers and their children and poverty and moving in or out of poor neighborhoods. So, that's one of the other reasons we want to follow children, is to see how environmental changes impact the kids over time.

ALVORD: So, what kind of, besides the Katrina [project], what kind of other research projects do you have sort of lined up?

WATERS: Well, I have one other project that is in the field right now. Which is looking at immigrants—Latino immigrants—in Boston, Los Angeles, and Miami, and looking at how they access social services. So it includes both documented and undocumented immigrants and the question is—in Europe, how immigrants get integrated into the society is studied very similarly to how we study it in the US—but in Europe there is a lot of attention to how much of the welfare state immigrants access. But in the US, we really haven't done very much research on that—at all. And that's partly because we have such an attenuated welfare state. But we do actually have programs that immigrants or their children are eligible for—such as food stamps, social welfare benefits, health care, benefits for like early intervention or other kinds of learning assistance for kids. And so we had some questions about both for people who are here legally and for people who are here without documents. How do they learn about where they can get help? How are they treated when they go in to talk to government bureaucrats? How do they get steered to either a church food pantry or to food stamps? And also, how much information do they give to one another about how to navigate this whole system? So we started doing in-depth interviews, and it's very much an ongoing project, but we started in Boston, and we're looking at Dominicans, El Salvadorans, and people from South America, and other places in Central America—Guatemalans. And we found really big differences across the groups, about how much they knew about government programs, and how they learned about how to access them. So we also then did some interviews in Los Angeles and in Miami, and we're finding really interesting things. So that is an exciting project that we're just really gearing up for.

MCCANNON: Nice, that is interesting. I spent a little bit of time in Sweden last year, and the difference in what is provided, the access that new immigrants have to navigating the welfare state is a lot different there than it is here. So, I could see definitely a lot of potential with that type of project, doing comparative—

WATERS: Right.

MCCANNON: —cross country comparative-type work, even at a qualitative level like that. And talking to people in different countries in these similar situations to kind of get an idea of just how really different it can be. Especially within the United States, just state-to-state—

WATERS: That's right.

MCCANNON: —dealing with different social policy regimes within states, that's definitely very interesting.

WATERS: One interesting thing we found is that in Los Angeles, Mexican immigrants, especially people who have papers, so legal Mexican immigrants, actually go down to Mexico for a lot of their health care because it's cheaper. And in Boston, you're not close enough to make the trip, but... for instance, if you get a dental problem in Los Angeles, it's way cheaper to just drive to Mexico and go to a Mexican dentist to get your teeth taken care of. Whereas in Boston, there really is no place, you just suffer with dental pain or lose your tooth. And of course this goes against all of the ideas that are out there about immigrants coming to the US, to take our health care and our welfare, right? Actually, we're finding the opposite, which is that the immigrants are like, going to someplace where it's much cheaper and they can get care that they need. So yeah, it's an interesting topic and it definitely varies by the region of the country.

ALVORD: Well, Professor Mary Waters, thank you so much. We really appreciate it.

WATERS: Oh, thank you, thank you. It was very fun.

FEATURED ARTICLE
ON
RELIGION AND ECONOMIC
INEQUALITY

RELIGION AND INEQUALITY: THE ROLE OF STATUS ATTAINMENT AND SOCIAL BALANCE PROCESSES

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Abstract

Religion is an important determinant of social and economic inequality, but the mechanisms that underlie this relationship are not well-understood. Early scholars recognized this connection, but their ideas do not adequately explain contemporary stratification patterns. Recent research documents robust empirical relationships between religion and material outcomes but has not yet begun to identify causes of these patterns. We fill this gap by providing a theoretical explanation of the religion-inequality link that synthesizes ideas from early and recent sociology. We propose that the process is inherently multilevel. We draw on ideas from status attainment theory to develop a micro-model and ideas from social balance theory to aggregate the

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model's outcomes. The synthesis of ideas from these theoretical traditions provides a unique, and potentially useful way to understand the relationship between cultural orientation and material resources.

Religion plays a central role in creating and maintaining social and economic inequality, but the mechanisms driving this relationship are not well-understood. Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002) contains the most famous early argument for a link between religion and inequality, but the ideas that he and other early theorists proposed have garnered significant critique. At the heart of Weber's thesis is the contention that changes in the religious orientation of Europeans through the influence of Protestantism, especially Calvinism, led to fundamental changes in the economic system. Scholars have challenged Weber's thesis on several grounds. Economic historians have argued that in many parts of Europe, the transition to capitalism preceded the emergence of reformed Protestantism (Bainton 1985; Samuelsson 1964). Therefore, it is equally plausible that the emergence of new forms of economic behavior produced changes in religious beliefs, or that religious and economic change are interdependent and often difficult to disentangle. Coleman (1990) criticizes Weber for positing a theory that claims individual beliefs straightforwardly aggregate into societal-level values. Such a simple process fails to account for how stratification develops, and how individual-level beliefs aggregate into different cultural orientations depending on one's social position.

Even if we disregard these internal problems, the religious landscape and the processes that account for stratification have changed considerably since Weber and his contemporaries developed their ideas. Looking only at patterns in North America, these theories cannot accommodate the decline of so-called mainline Protestant denominations, the proliferation of conservative Protestant groups, the impact of immigration on the composition of the Catholic Church, and the increased presence of other religious traditions. It has also become increasingly clear that the relationship between religion and stratification is not a function of large-scale shifts in the mode of production but rather reflects

changing individual and group approaches to human capital, work, entrepreneurship, saving, and investing.

In the 1960s, researchers revived questions about religion and inequality. However, these debates lost momentum when the convergence of the socioeconomic status (SES) of mainline Protestants and Catholics came to dominate the literature (Glenn and Hyland 1967; Lenski 1961; Roof and McKinney 1987). The more recent years have witnessed something of a renaissance in the study of religion and inequality. However, although contemporary research is empirically rich, it has paid relatively little attention to the causal processes linking religion and material outcomes. Modern data provide powerful evidence that religion affects education for adults (Chiswick 1988; Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Lehrer 1999b, 2004) and adolescents (Muller and Ellison 2001; Sherkat and Darnell 1999), gender roles in the home (Ellison and Bartkowski 2002; Read 2004) and in the labor market (Lehrer 1999a, 2000; Sherkat and Darnell 1999), fertility and family formation (Glass and Jacobs 2005; Lehrer 1996b, 1996c; McQuillan 2004), wages (Keister 2010; Smith and Faris 2005; Steen 1996; Wilder and Walters 1998), work and occupational outcomes (Smith and Faris 2005), and saving behavior and wealth (Crowe 2008; Keister 2003, 2007, 2008). Researchers have understandably taken advantage of modern data and methods to provide careful empirical support for key relationships that eluded prior generations of scholars. However, the resulting body of research contains a large amount of evidence for bivariate relationships but minimal discussion of how the interactions among variables produce social stratification. The theoretical discussion accompanying most of the empirical evidence contains an implicit status attainment model but rarely articulates or demonstrates causal processes linking religion and inequality. Moreover, contemporary researchers do not always adequately attend to the problems inherent in using individual-level data to draw inferences about group-level outcomes.

Our objective is to provide a contemporary theoretical explanation of how religion affects inequality. The first step in understanding this relationship is clarifying that there are separate but related processes operating at the individual (micro) and group (macro) levels. This starting point allows us to integrate ideas from

early and contemporary research while moving beyond the challenges faced in both. We propose that micro-level processes connect religion to individual and family material well-being following a status attainment logic. We articulate the details of this model, discuss how important behaviors and processes are interrelated, and address how various processes interact to affect inequality. We pay particular attention to integrating the large amount of empirical evidence available from contemporary scholarship. Next, we show that ideas from social balance theory can explain how individual and family processes combine to produce group-level patterns. Finally, we specify the details of the balance model and discuss the implications for aggregate indicators of social inequality.

Religion and Social Stratification: Two Levels of Aggregation

Most efforts to explain how religion affects social stratification attempt to isolate either individual or group outcomes. Effective isolation of this sort is challenging because, under most circumstances, it requires focusing on one level of aggregation without invoking behaviors or outcomes at the other level. Early theorists attempted to isolate macro-level outcomes by addressing how national patterns of religious affiliation affected national patterns of economic organization (Sombart 1911; Weber 2002). Only a limited number of cases exist at the macro level, making comparison difficult. Additionally, it is difficult to collect data at the macro-level. Thus, in most cases, early theorists resorted to discussing how individual behaviors lead to aggregate patterns (Coleman 1990). More recent research focuses more narrowly on micro-level outcomes (e.g., individual income, family wealth) because these processes are essential to understanding contemporary stratification processes. Moreover, data are often collected at the level of individuals or other levels below that of the social system. Although contemporary explanations focus on micro-level explanations of micro-level outcomes, it is common to invoke macro-level causes (e.g., neighborhood, generational effects) or to draw conclusions about macro-level issues (e.g., group differences in income, work, wealth) from micro-level data without carefully specifying how the levels interact (Coleman 1990).

An alternative to focusing on either the micro- or the macro-level is to explicitly integrate both levels, creating a more complete model of the social system within which religion and inequality interact. Our goal with such a model is to (1) explain how group-level religious ideology affects individual orientations toward education, work, financial issues, and family decisions; (2) address how these orientations affect individual economic behavior; and (3) demonstrate how these behaviors aggregate to group measures of material well-being (e.g., education, income, wealth). Figure 1 provides a sketch of the system within which religion affects social stratification.

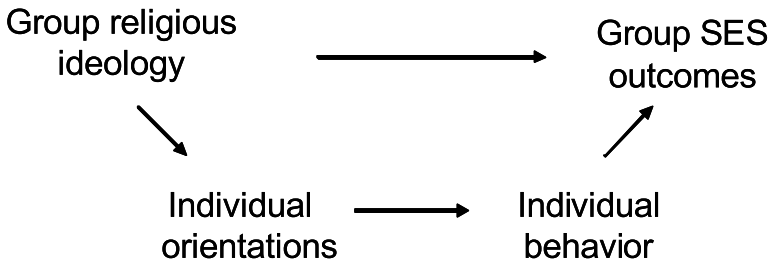


Figure 1. Religion and Material Outcomes

We draw on Coleman (1990) to provide the basic structure of the model. Group religious ideology operates through individual orientations, which in turn influence individual behaviors, which produce observed group-level differences. We incorporate relevant findings from contemporary research in social stratification that suggest micro-level processes are key to understanding group-level differences in status attainment.

Micro Model

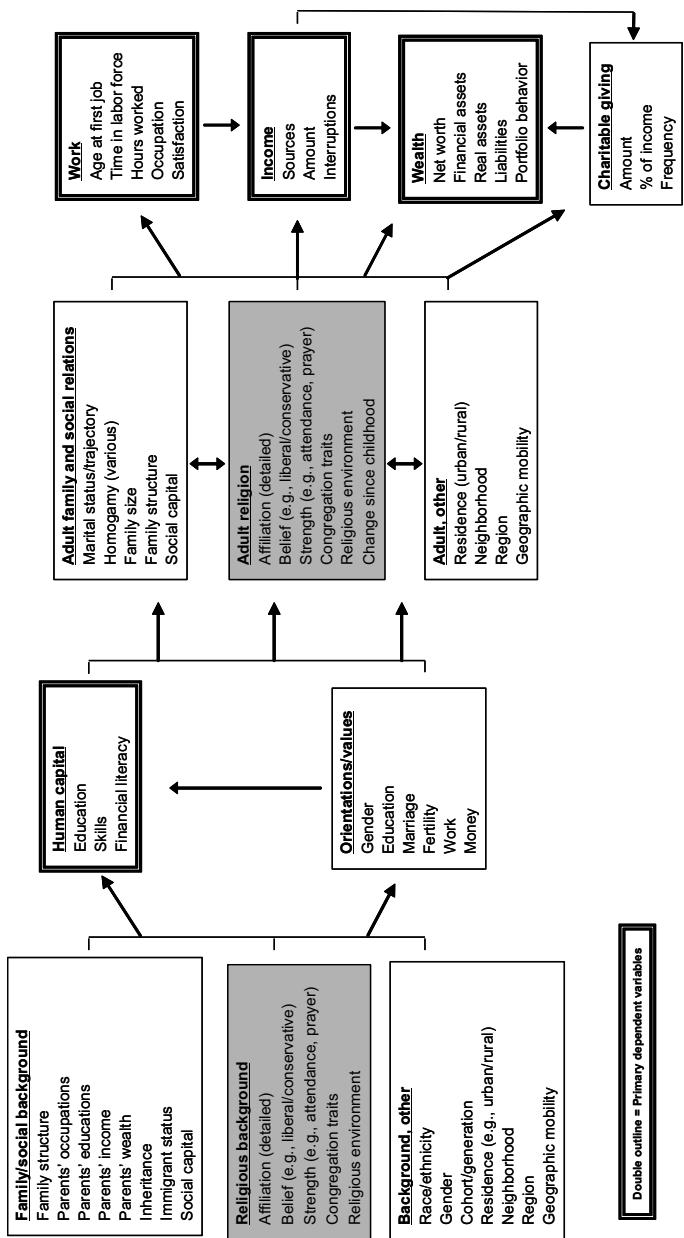
Key Concepts

A status attainment model relating childhood and adult religion to education, work and occupational status, income, and wealth relates the individual and family processes that connect religious

ideology to micro-level material outcomes (Figure 2).¹ Status attainment refers to the process by which individuals arrive at socioeconomic standing over their lives, and the status attainment approach has become one of the most widely used theoretical perspectives in sociological research on social and economic well-being. Work in this tradition specifies individual traits or attributes, usually family background, education, and work behaviors that contribute to adult attainment. Although other theoretical models may potentially relate religious ideology and micro-level material outcomes, a growing body of related empirical evidence supports the status attainment model. Equally important, the status attainment model includes most of the important behaviors and processes that affect attainment, allows for interactions among these processes, effectively describes how family characteristics affect adult outcomes, and retains the appropriate time-ordering (e.g., family background affects education, which affects adult occupation). Because the status attainment model incorporates both individual/family and contextual influences on micro-outcomes, it also efficiently and accurately represents the macro-micro and micro-micro links pictured in Figure 1.

In the status attainment model, childhood religion refers to affiliation, belief, practice, congregation traits, and the broader religious environment. Affiliation is the religious denomination or tradition with which an individual is associated. In the United States, persuasive evidence shows that members of religious groups behave similarly in consequential ways (Burststein 2007; Glass and Jacobs 2005; Keister 2008; Lehrer 2009; Smith and Faris 2005). A long history of research shows that affiliation with mainline Protestant, conservative Protestant, black Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, or other religious groups affects well-being (Herberg 1983). The proliferation of Protestant denominations in recent decades and fluctuations in the sizes of some denominations and traditions suggests that it is becoming increasingly important to also consider more precise information about religious affiliation (Smith and Faris 2005). For instance,

¹ Although our research focuses on how religion affects individual and family SES, we realize that other processes are at work. For example, research has documented that SES affects religious affiliation, particularly for adults.



Notes: Variable lists are not necessarily comprehensive. See text for explanations of variables and relationships

Figure 2. The Individual- and Household-Level Attainment Model

patterns vary for those affiliated with more narrowly defined traditions. One line of research documents how members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have divergent economic trajectories from other conservative groups (Smith and Faris 2005).

Religious belief and practice, congregation traits, and religious environment also influence the individual and family processes that affect well-being. *Belief* is the substance or content of religious ideas (e.g., belief that the Bible is the inerrant word of God). The *strength* of religious conviction is the importance of religious belief to the individual and is usually measured as religious practice such as the frequency of attendance at religious services. *Congregation* traits (e.g., size, socioeconomic class, beliefs) have become increasingly important in understanding how religion affects well-being as the size of denominations grows and diversity within denominations expands (Chaves and Miller 1999; Edgell 2006; Park and Reimer 2002; Reimer 2007). *Religious environment* refers to the broader religious context and the position of a denomination or congregation in that context. For instance, membership in a denomination that is growing in size or enjoying greater social acceptance is likely to have different implications than membership in a denomination that is decreasing in size or falling out of social favor (D'Antonio, Hoge, and Davidson 2007; Hout, Greeley, and Wilde 2001; Roof and McKinney 1987). Both congregations and religious environments are elements of the context (i.e., macro-level) that affect micro orientations and outcomes (depicted in Figure 2).

Family and social background traits are also important elements of the micro model. Family structure during childhood, parents' socioeconomic status (including occupations, education, income, and wealth, family immigrant status, and social capital/relations combine to shape childhood experience.² In addition, sociological research has demonstrated that race/ethnicity, gender, and other individual attributes affect

² Family and household groups are treated in various ways in multilevel models. We include families and households as part of the aggregate level. However, we include family background and adult family traits as characteristic of the individual in the micro model, consistent with status-attainment literature.

attainment levels and trajectories.³ Research has also demonstrated that families transmit cultural capital (Jaeger 2009), which plays an important role in status attainment. Figure 2 depicts contextual factors as part of the background traits that affect micro-level outcomes. Membership in a birth cohort or generation, residence in an urban or rural area, neighborhood, and region of the country are integral parts of the attainment process. Similarly, mobility among different areas during childhood and adolescence can affect the way the attainment process unfolds. Moreover, contextual factors such as congregation and religious environment are elements of the macro-level situation in which micro-level attainment processes occur.

Combined with other traits, childhood religion helps produce human capital and values or orientations. *Human capital* is an intermediary outcome that operates as both an initial outcome and an explanatory factor in predicting subsequent outcomes. Human capital includes characteristics of formal education (e.g., attainment, private versus public, timing), skills, training, work experience, and related traits. Human capital also captures the notion of financial literacy (i.e., acquired knowledge related to budgeting, saving, and investing) that is particularly important in understanding saving behavior and wealth accumulation.

Orientations, or *values*, are guiding principles or ideals that express the worth associated with particular actions or outcomes (Joas 2000; Maio et al. 2003; Schwartz and Bilsky 1987). They are directed toward particular behaviors or states and follow from religion, which is a more general orienting approach or ideology (Hitlin 2003; Hitlin and Piliavin 2004; Joas 2000; Kohn et al. 2000). Notions of values and orientation fell out of favor in sociology, including in the sociology of religion, following some controversial uses of the terms decades ago. However, the terms are receiving a more favorable reception in current research that has demonstrated that values are essential to understanding, among other processes, how religion affects behaviors and outcomes. For instance, there is evidence that religion is associated with

³ Race and ethnicity can be considered individual or family traits, particularly in religions where congregations and denominations cluster around people with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds. The process described here is the same regardless.

orientations toward gender roles in the home and in the workplace (Glass and Jacobs 2005; Lehrer 1995; Peek, Lowe, and Williams 1991; Sherkat 2000), education and educational attainment (Chiswick 1988; Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Glass and Jacobs 2005; Lehrer 1999b), marriage and fertility (Marcum 1981, 1986; Sherkat and Darnell 1999), and parent-child relations (Bartkowski and Read 2003; Ellison, Bartkowski, and Segal 1996; Ellison and Sherkat 1993). Religious beliefs also affect orientations toward work and money. That is, beliefs express preferences regarding desirable occupations, acceptable work behavior, work-family balance issues, sacrificial giving, how money affects prospects for the afterlife, and the desirability of saving from current income (Crowe 2008; Keister 2007, 2008; Maio et al. 2003).⁴

As Figure 2 indicates, human capital and orientations/values affect material outcomes through adult family and social relations, adult religion, and other individual and contextual traits. *Adult family* includes marital status and trajectory, marital homogamy (e.g., religious, educational, occupational), family size and structure, and social capital. Adult religion refers to religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices as well as congregation traits and religious environment. For many, childhood and adult religion will be the same, but *religious change* can also affect adult well-being (Roof 1989). *Charitable giving* includes the dollar amount of donations to religious and other charitable organizations, the percent of income dedicated to charitable giving, and the frequency of contributions.

The model explicitly identifies four measures of well-being on which individuals and groups are stratified: human capital, work and occupation, income, and wealth. However, other dimensions could be incorporated into the model as well. Similarly, individual and family traits that appear in the model, but not identified as outcomes in Figure 2 (e.g., gender, race), could be explicitly discussed. Gender and race are both strongly commingled with religious affiliation and beliefs and are also among the most enduring determinants of attainment and life trajectories. Although

⁴ There is an increasing amount of literature that focuses more directly on identifying, measuring, and understanding values (Hechter 1993; Inglehart and Baker 2000; Schwartz and Huismans 1995).

we do not discuss them in great length here, gender and race could easily be the focus of empirical exploration using this model. *Human capital* is an important intermediary concept that is an outcome itself and that also contributes to work and occupational well-being, income, and wealth. *Work* refers to childhood and adult jobs, including age at first employment, time spent in the labor force (and its corollary: time spent out of the labor force involuntarily), hours worked, and occupational prestige. *Income* refers to total monetary flows into the household (e.g., earned income versus government transfer payments) as well as categorical indicators related to income (e.g., the occurrence and frequency of income interruptions). *Wealth* is total net worth (total assets less total liabilities) as well as measures of financial assets (net worth less equity in owner-occupied housing), real assets (housing and other tangibles), and liabilities (consumer debt, mortgage debt, business debt). Wealth also includes categorical indicators (e.g., measures of portfolio composition).

Micro Model: Mechanisms

In this model, religion affects material outcomes through several channels. The cultural understandings that accompany religious beliefs can influence well-being through *demographic behaviors* that facilitate or impede human capital acquisition, career advancement and other work behaviors and outcomes, income, and wealth ownership. Religion affects orientations toward education, the attainment of formal education, and the acquisition of other types of training, experience, and expertise (Burstein 2007; Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Glass and Jacobs 2005; Lehrer 1999b). Religion influences sexuality and fertility, including the onset of sexual activity, age at first birth, and family size (Lehrer 1996a; Marcum 1981; Sherkat and Darnell 1999). Religion affects parenting styles and relationships between parents and their children (Bartkowski and Ellison 1995; Ellison and Sherkat 1993). Religion influences age at first marriage, marital stability, and the likelihood of separation and divorce (Call and Heaton 1997; Lehrer 1996a). There is also a strong relationship between religion and gender roles (D'Antonio et al. 2001; Hertel and Hughes 1987; Peek, Lowe, and Williams 1991), including female educational attainment and labor force participation particularly when children

are young (Glass and Jacobs 2005; Lehrer 1995; Sherkat 2000). These processes combine to influence occupational advancement, income, other financial benefits, the availability of funds to save, and wealth accumulation, particularly in faiths where religious homogeneity is high (Lehrer 1996a).

Religion can influence material well-being by shaping *values and orientations* toward work and occupation, budgeting, consumption, charitable giving, debt, saving, and asset accumulation (Crowe 2008; Glass and Jacobs 2005; Keister 2008; Read 2004). Religious beliefs affect the relative prestige of certain occupations (e.g. working as a minister, or a career missionary) and organizations (e.g. religiously based charities). Religious beliefs also influence notions of the relative importance of work and family commitments and time allocation, the willingness to relocate to improve job prospects and career advancement, the desirability of self-employment, and the relative importance of income, advancement possibilities, and job content (Edgell 2006; Glass and Jacobs 2005; Johnson 2001; Keister 2007). Religious beliefs also affect orientations toward money and financial decisions including budgeting, active saving, the importance of charitable giving, the selection of worthwhile charities, and the amount of money given to charities (Chaves 1999; Hoge et al. 1999; Keister 2008). The value associated with particular work and financial behaviors varies dramatically by religious affiliation and belief, but there is little question that money is meaningfully connected to values and orientations both implicitly and explicitly (Peifer 2011; Wuthnow 1994; Zelizer 1978,).

Religion can also affect material well-being through *social contacts*. Children learn from their parents and others with whom they are associated how to approach education, work, and financial decision-making, including savings behaviors and ideas about the appropriateness of debt (Cavalli-Sforza 1993; Chiteji and Stafford 1999, 2000; Keister 2008). Parents and teachers affect children's perspectives on education and work through the structuring of children's activities both at home (Lareau 2002, 2003) and in the classroom (Willis 1981). Parents' jobs and their attitudes toward those jobs also convey class-based information to children that have the potential to affect socioeconomic attainment (Kohn 1976; Kohn and Slomczynski 2001; Kohn et al. 2000). Parents and other

adults also convey information about saving and investing that affects how children approach money. Financial literacy is learned, and people who are not exposed to positive lessons regarding financial literacy at home, in church, or in school may be at a disadvantage in accumulating wealth.

Finally, because there is often stability between parents and their children in terms of religion and SES there are powerful *intergenerational processes* that intensify the relationship between religion and material outcomes. Occupational and earnings similarity across generations is high. Parents with high education and incomes have children with high educations and incomes. Parents with wealth bequeath their assets to their children, and the saving behavior of prior generations will determine inheritance size: those brought up in religious communities where savings is low will inherit less than those in groups where saving is high. Parents also transfer their religious beliefs to their children. Many Americans remain affiliated with the religions in which they were raised and marry others who were raised in similar faiths. Religion also creates social contacts. Depending on the religious environment, this can provide information about educational opportunities, jobs, business opportunities, or sources of capital that facilitate achievement. In contrast, in faiths where overall achievement levels are limited, the lack of consequential social ties may create a disadvantage. Adult religious affiliation and involvement may intensify and reinforce the values learned during childhood, especially when both members of a couple were raised in the same faith.

Although we discuss these processes as isolated, many of these behaviors and events interact with each other or occur simultaneously. People often make decisions regarding education, marriage, fertility, union dissolution, and related behaviors simultaneously. For example, decisions regarding marriage often involve simultaneous decisions about fertility, labor force participation, and saving. Moreover, there are likely to be meaningful interactions among the various behaviors and processes represented in the model. Lehrer (2004, 2009) has articulated how religious affiliation relates to various demographic processes and resulting measures of attainment. She proposes that investments in human capital, fertility behavior, union formation and dissolution,

and other demographic processes are interrelated behaviors and that internalized religious teachings affect the perceived costs and benefits associated with these decisions. Expanding on details about which variables interact and how to test the simultaneous processes implied here are beyond the scope of this paper, but future research might usefully address these issues.

Micro Models and Group-Level Outcomes

The status attainment model presented so far identifies the processes that relate religious ideology to micro-level material outcomes, but it does not explain how these processes aggregate to group patterns (e.g., group-level income, education, occupational prestige; measures of inequality in these and other outcomes). The aggregation problem in this case is identifying the process by which the members of certain religious groups also share similar economic outcomes (e.g., education, skills, income, occupational traits, income, and wealth). The reasons that groups and their members consistently share ideologies, skills, and material outcomes is complex, involving a large number of processes. Moreover, ideologies are not transferred in the same way that skills and material outcomes typically are. The transfer of an ideology involves both interpersonal transmission processes and individual acceptance (or rejection) of the tenets of the ideology (Joas 2000; Maio et al. 2003; Schwartz and Bilsky 1987). Children usually adopt the ideology most common in the family, and as result, young children and their parents tend to have similar perspectives on many issues. However, over the life course many people alter their religious and ideological perspectives (Maio et al. 2003; Schwartz and Bilsky 1987). Although structural impediments may be relatively deterministic in the intergenerational transmission of education, income, and wealth, there is a great deal more freedom with respect to religious ideas. For example, transitioning from being a low- to high-wage earner may be much more difficult than transitioning from a Christian ideology to a non-religious ideology.

Linking Micro and Macro: Social Balance Theory

Linking micro-level processes and behaviors to macro-level outcomes requires an understanding of how changes in the social composition of a group impact its stated ideology. Ideas from

social balance theory provide a valuable starting point for understanding how groups change (Johnsen 1986; Moody 1998). The starting point for balance theory is the idea that interactions in social groups, particularly in triads, tend toward balance (Heider 1946, 1958). That is, the underlying principle of the theory is that people tend toward balanced relations and away from imbalanced relations. In a balanced triad, all parties have the same affect toward all other parties. One example is the well-known pattern that dictates “a friend of a friend is a friend.” That is, if person A and person B are friends, and person A and person C are friends, then person B is likely to be friends with person C. Balance theory also has implications for social dynamics. For instance, if a triad is balanced (e.g., A, B, and C are all friends) and one of the relations changes (e.g., A and B sever their friendship), balance theory indicates that the remaining relations will also change until balance is regained (e.g., either A and B will resume their friendship).

Balance theory is also useful for understanding how groups interact with ideas, such as religious ideas. In this pattern A is the group identity on a particular issue, B is the aggregation of the group’s beliefs about an idea, and C is the idea itself. The rules of social balance operate as they do with three people. For example, if a church (A) has traditionally seen the acquisition of wealth as “sinful” (C) but outside economic forces generate increased economic success among the church’s members, the average economic status of the members (B), will increase. Now tension exists between the group’s identity and the composition of the group. Social balance theory predicts that this tension will initiate a process where A and B are brought back in line. The church might change its official opinion, reject the more successful members, or downplay the significance of I. This pattern is a process that occurs over time and may be contested by involved parties. Therefore, a specific path to restore balance may take several forms. Imagine, for example, a group of adolescents who leave home for the first time to attend college. All these adolescents are members of the same church, and they share a religious ideology with their church, creating a balanced triad. However, when the adolescents arrive at college they may encounter new religious ideas. If these adolescents return to their church with a different set of religious ideas, it will create tension and the system will seek resolution.

Social Balance Model: Key Concepts

Groups have three traits that are relevant to understanding the balance model: dominant ideologies, dominant skill sets, and shared rules. Groups share various *ideologies*, or general orienting statements (Maio et al. 2003; Schwartz and Huismans 1995; Schwartz, Struch, and Bilsky 1990). Liberal and conservative ideologies, for example, are broad theoretical constructions that subsume more specific values (i.e., statements of ideals) and attitudes (i.e., feelings or beliefs toward specific states and behaviors (Maio et al. 2003). A conservative religious ideology might include attaching high importance to traditional family values and a positive attitude toward women staying out of the labor force when their children are young. The group may have different ideologies for different arenas (e.g., religion, economics, politics) and corresponding values and attitudes. A group's dominant ideology refers to the ideology within each arena that is the most influential in the group. In most cases, a majority of group members will adhere to the ideology, but it is not necessary for the ideology to be shared by the majority. Groups may employ a variety of rationalizations to explain the difference.

Groups also have dominant *skill sets*, such as education, that characterize the majority of members. Shared ideologies are likely to include orientations toward certain skills (e.g., educational attainment is desirable) that encourage members to develop skills and that contribute to skill overlap within a group. Finally, groups have *shared rules*, both formal and informal, that develop to maintain order and to identify the group's goals and priorities. Formal rules, or laws, are codified and enforced through formal channels (e.g., a formal prohibition by a religious group against same-sex marriage). Informal rules, or norms, are not codified and are enforced through social sanctioning (e.g., a norm that women are primarily responsible for childcare).

Social Balance Model: Initial Balance

The balance model of people, groups, and religion begins in a state of social balance: the individuals and the group initially tend to share a positive affect toward a particular ideology. People are born into multiple groups (e.g., families, churches, neighborhoods). As the status attainment model suggests, these early group

experiences provide starting points for both individual ideologies and skills. Children adopt the ideologies and orientations toward skills that are most common in their families and other groups for several reasons. First, children have few alternatives. As the status attainment literature demonstrates, children are exposed to a limited number of ideological options early in life, these options vary predictably by social class (Kohn 1959; Lareau 2003). Second, because children tend to like and identify with their parents (Gecas and Seff 1990), they are likely to emulate their parents' perspectives. Third, groups use formal and informal sanctions to encourage conformity. Social sanctioning can be as seemingly innocent as correcting a child who expresses a contrary opinion (e.g., there must not be a God), or more intense and consequential (e.g., excommunicating a member for homosexual behavior). Triad A pictured in Figure 3 illustrates this initial state. This triad is balanced because the group (G1) and the individuals (I) both have a positive affect toward the ideology (ID1) and toward each other. The figure simplifies the process by including only one collection of individuals, one group, and one ideology. We address multiple, overlapping group memberships below.

Change and Rebalancing

Over time, exogenous factors can lead individuals to adopt new ideologies or cause the dominant group ideology to change. The status attainment model identifies important points at which exogenous factors might lead to individual-level change such as a broadening of opportunities to pursue higher education, a change in local economic conditions, and the increasing cost of raising children. Similarly, new group leaders might introduce alternative orientations to a group, or denominational controversies may force congregations to clarify their position on issues that were previously downplayed. In either case, there is a possibility that the exogenous factor will lead to imbalance in the triad. Balance theory offers an explanation of the interpersonal processes that result. Figure 3 illustrates that the triad may become unbalanced in one of two ways: (1) if, on average, the individuals in the group adopt a negative affect toward ID1 (pictured in triad C1), or (2), if the group adopts a negative affect toward ID1 (pictured in triad C2). Both triads C1 and C2 include an uncertain relationship between

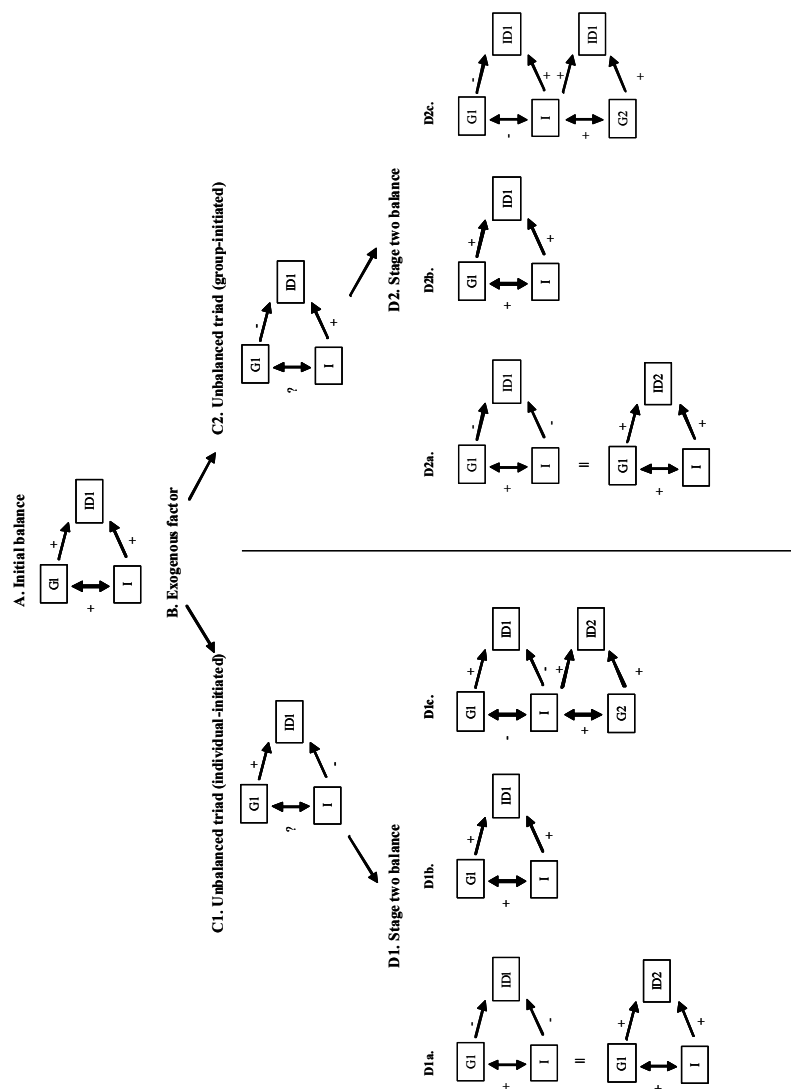


Figure 3. Aggregating to Group Outcomes with Balance Theory

the individuals and group resulting from their inconsistent affects toward ID1.

Resolving individual-initiated imbalance

Balance theory suggests that there are several possible resolutions to the individual-initiated imbalance pictured in C1. The triads pictured in D1 represent the possible outcomes given that the imbalance was individual-initiated (C1). Each D1 and D2 triad indicates a new time period and a triad that has returned to balance. The first resolution to the imbalance pictured in C1 is shown in D1a and indicates that the group also adopts a negative affect toward ID1. That is, the group changes its orientation toward the ideology to match the new majority opinion of its members. The upper and lower triads labeled D1a are equivalent. The upper triad indicates both the individuals and the group adopt negative affects toward the original ideology (ID1), and the lower triad indicates that they both adopt a positive affect toward a new ideology (ID2). Therefore, if both the individuals and the group still disagree but decide to downplay the importance of ID1, they agree. Moreover, a negative affect toward ID1 can be considered a different ideology (and labeled ID2). In either case, the outcome is renewed balance.

The second possible resolution to the imbalance pictured in C1 is that the individual returns to his or her original affect toward ID1 (pictured in D1b). For example, students returning from college with new religious ideas might again adopt a positive affect to their group's dominant ideology once back in the community. The triad pictured in D1b is, therefore, identical to the initial triad (A). The third possible resolution to the imbalance pictured in C1 is shown in D1c. In this outcome, the individuals adopt a negative affect toward the group and continue to hold a positive affect toward the new ideology (ID2). This is equivalent to the individuals adopting a positive affect toward a new group (G2) and a new ideology (ID2). This potential outcome is exemplified by the students who adopt new religious ideas at college, return home, and start a new religious group based on these new ideas. Negative feelings toward the community of origin and positive feelings to the new group results.

Resolving group-initiated imbalance

There are also several resolutions to the imbalance pictured in C2, which occurs when the orientation of the group toward the original ideology becomes negative. First, it is possible that the individuals will also adopt this new affect toward the original ideology (pictured in D2a). This resolution implies that the majority of individuals decided to go along with the dominant group opinion. As Figure 3 suggests, this is equivalent to both the group (G1) and the individuals adopting a positive affect toward a new ideology (ID2). Imagine, for example, that a denomination forces a congregation to take a pro-life position on abortion, an issue the group has not discussed because members of the church have contrasting views. Dissenting members of the group might be convinced after a reconsideration of this issue and adopt the resolution. The second possible resolution to the imbalance pictured in C2a is a return to the initial balance (pictured in D2b and A). This implies that the dominant group perspective returns to its original state. It follows that the triad is again balanced if the individuals retain a positive affect toward the initial position. The third resolution to the group-initiated imbalance is for the group to retain its negative affect toward the original ideology (ID1), a subset of individuals to retain a positive affect toward the ideology, and the group and this subset of individuals to adopt a negative affect toward each other (i.e., these individuals leave the group, and the group does not attempt to retain the lost members). This resolution is pictured as D2c, an outcome that is equivalent to the individuals joining a new group (G2) whose members are positively predisposed toward ID1.⁵

Impetus for change

Change occurs when the individuals and the group drift apart. When the level of difference between individuals and the group on ideology or skills becomes intolerable to consequential individuals or to the majority of group members, the relationship will be perceived as imbalanced and change will occur. Of course, not all individuals in a group have exactly the same ideologies, always

⁵ Membership in multiple groups is common, and an imbalance in one group can lead to imbalance in other groups. Each group would return to balance through the same process.

follow all the rules, or have identical skillsets. However, social balance processes suggest that groups will be similar on these traits, downplay the significance of areas where differences are present, and change will occur when the difference becomes intolerable.

Conclusion

Religion is a critical determinant of social and economic inequality, and theorists across the social sciences have speculated about its role for decades. Despite this longstanding interest, there is still little consensus on the mechanisms that account for the religion-inequality relationship. Recent research provides compelling and mounting evidence of strong empirical patterns relating religious affiliation, religious beliefs, and religiosity to a host of SES indicators. However, this work has not yet moved beyond providing careful empirical evidence to explore the causal processes that underlie the patterns found in contemporary data. This article provides a contemporary, multilevel, causal model, which explains how religion affects inequality. We argue that micro-level processes link religion to individual and family material outcomes following a status attainment model. We also provide the details of the components of the model that link the various elements. We propose that the aggregation of individual and family processes to group outcomes can be understood using social balance theory. We argue that exogenous factors that change either the group composition or the group's ideology initiate social imbalance between the composition of the group's members and the group's official position. Social imbalances seek resolution, and so if the group changes its ideology or members change their ideas, the significance of the tension is downplayed, or dissenting members leave the group.

This work contributes to understanding differences across people and groups in economic attainment and the important role that religious ideology plays in shaping well-being. More centrally, this paper contributes to understanding the relationship between cultural orientation and material resources. This model addresses the process by which individuals and the groups to which they belong can remain wealthy or poor. This work also contributes to understanding social processes more generally. Status attainment

has become taken-for-granted in research aimed at understanding individual and family well-being, but it is seldom paired with other perspectives on social behavior to understand its position relative to other social systems. Likewise, although Coleman's model of the interaction between micro and macro processes has become well-known, few studies have explored how the aggregation of individual and family processes happens. Finally, social balance theory is widely used in some circles, but it does not typically play a central role in theories of stratification or religion. In this paper, we draw on ideas from each of these perspectives to develop a model that can answer critical social questions.

Future research could empirically test many of these ideas using studies such as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which includes information on religion, social networks, and short- and long-term socioeconomic standing. Empirical exploration of these issues will naturally raise related concerns that data analysis will usefully adjudicate. For example, empirical exploration of the patterns of interaction among variables will demonstrate which interactions are relevant in which settings. Future work might also extend ideas from either the micro- or macro- portions of the model to motivate further theoretical research. The evidence suggests that unique values regarding work and money combined with amenable demographic behaviors (e.g., educational attainment, stable marriage, and high female labor force participation) afforded Roman Catholics considerable upward mobility in the wealth distribution in recent decades. However, we know little about the practices that lead some religious groups to accumulate relatively high-value wealth portfolios. For example, Mormons tend to be religiously conservative, but there is little evidence that they are asset-poor. We know little about how individual decisions and processes for these groups aggregate to group outcomes. Using the model described here to contrast Mormons with other conservative Protestants might yield insights into the behaviors and values that affect saving behavior and wealth ownership.

Similarly, the growth of suburban megachurches has created a growing group of people who call themselves Conservative Protestants but who tend to be higher SES than the typical American conservative Protestant. Moreover, people affiliated with

the Jewish tradition tend to have relatively high net worth, but there are significant differences in wealth accumulation between Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews. The causal pathways that undergird each of these patterns are not well understood. We know very little about the effects of other religious traditions, including Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism, on material well-being. The approach described in this paper could usefully address these groups and may illuminate unique aggregation processes within these groups. Research along these lines could also help differentiate religious influences from ethnic processes.

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BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEW

***Connecting Social Problems and Popular Culture: Why Media is Not the Answer*, Second Edition, by Karen Sternheimer. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013, 320 pages, \$37.00 Paper. ISBN: 9780813347233.**

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In *Connecting Social Problems with Popular Culture*, University of Southern California sociologist Karen Sternheimer argues that our often media-inspired tendency to demonize pop culture draws attention and problem-solving efforts away from the economic disparities that are the true foundation of our nation's challenges.

Countering the taken-for-granted or seldom-questioned bits of misinformation that have come to inform commonplace American opinions on violence, sex, education and the perceived loss of childhood innocence, Sternheimer weaves a constructivist argument that combines fresh and incisive logic with smart debunking of media misrepresentations. Emphasizing how news items cherry-picked for commercial impact are no match for a nuanced understanding of the structural, economic and historical fabric of our society, she tackles concerns about television, video games, education, promiscuity, materialism, body image, drugs and more in a few short and extremely engaging chapters. With reference to sociologist Barry Glassner, author of *The Culture of Fear*, Sternheimer seconds the idea of a "social sleight of hand" whereby our media-driven fixation on popular culture as the root of social problems is instead a distraction that deflects our gaze from the deeper structural and economic issues.

To the complaint handed down from one generation of elders to the next that popular culture corrupts the young, Sternheimer

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responds with a call for a more rational view of history, pointing out that much of this anxiety is rooted in an overly romanticized idea of childhoods past. Since the agricultural era, the Industrial Revolution, and the subsequent rise of compulsory education, parents and kids have spent fewer and fewer hours of the day in side-by-side activities. Kids' days are now passed more safely at school, rather than the factory or farm, but the reduced face-time between parents and children foments concerns that we, as parents, are not fully in control of shaping their fledgling values and that their innocence lies open to predatory media and commercial interests. Sternheimer questions whether the definitions of childhood behind these fears are really very functional, though. "The idea that childhood in the past was composed of carefree days without worry is a conveniently reconstructed version of history. This fantasy allows adults to feel nostalgia for a lost idealized past that never was," she writes, adding that the American obsession with the idea of childhood innocence "serves adult needs and reinforces adult power rather than best meeting the needs of young people" (p. 26).

To the common complaint that pop culture's barrage of screen-based violence is destroying the safety of our communities, Sternheimer presents a series of arguments that casts a glaring light on the degree to which statistics and academic research are often recklessly misrepresented in news broadcasts and print journalism. She notes that it is interesting, for example, that in spite of rising trends in on-screen violence, total homicide rates have dropped from 9.3 per 100,000 to 4.8 per 100,000 over the last 20 years, while rates for children, which were already much lower to begin with, have dropped even more sharply. Although responsible for far less violent crime than adults, kids receive much more media coverage for it, Sternheimer argues, referencing a Berkeley Media Studies Group finding that half of news stories about youth focused on violence (p. 107).

Elaborating further here and bringing in some of her own qualitative work, Sternheimer tells of her past research as part of a team exploring causes of violence among youth from a Los Angeles neighborhood heavy in gang activity. The team found that the kids who dealt with real violence as a part of their everyday existence did not find much in media violence to take seriously.

“Many described media violence as gorier, with over-the-top special effects,” she writes (p. 129). What they did report, however, was that watching the violence made them more fearful about the dangers in their own neighborhoods and Sternheimer concludes, “We can’t honestly address media violence until we recognize that, in part, our media culture is violent because we, as a society, are” (p. 132).

Again the underlying problem here is not youth culture but the poverty and inequality that are ignored in the course of our media-fabricated distractions, Sternheimer says. Another example is the story of twelve-year-old Lionel Tate who beat to death a six-year-old girl and later made headlines with a lawyer who attempted to explain the death as an accident resulting from Tate’s enthusiasm for televised wrestling. But, according to reports from neighbors, a former teacher and a forensic psychologist, Tate already had a long history of trouble with violence, drugs and anger management. The defense did not pass jury scrutiny, and Tate did spend time in jail, but to this uncommon tale of an actual youth murder case, Sternheimer points out that “completely lost in the discussion surrounding this case is our repeated failure as a society to treat children like Lionel *before* violent behavior escalates” (p. 113, *italics original*).

Another common area of concern is the widespread idea that popular culture is driving a “dumbing down” of American youth and a ramping up of materialism and greed. In a chapter exploring commercialism and education, Sternheimer points to the case of a San Diego calculus teacher who sold advertising space on his exams after state budget cuts left him without enough money to print the number of worksheets he felt his students needed to succeed. In addition to budget cuts and their impacts on kids and schools, Sternheimer notes that communities offering tax breaks to try to attract new businesses may also be dangerously undermining the tax base that funds local public education. Referring to the relatively new trend placing ads in schools and at school events, she writes, “The sad fact is that advertisers often value children as consumers more than our society values them as students, and advertisers are fronting the money to prove it” (p. 263). This argument, as well as Sternheimer’s elaboration of the history of urban flight and the real estate redlining practices that have left

many districts still struggling today, bestows a deep structural and economic understanding of the rationale behind those ads in the schools and other efforts just to make ends meet.

In *Connecting Social Problems with Popular Culture*, Sternheimer commandeers a topic near and dear to many college-age readers to open a creative lens for the exploration of social problems in the United States. Books such as this one, which begin by asserting a devil's advocate position, have to be out of the gate and running with a solid defense from page one. Sternheimer crafts it expertly, offering insightful questions and rapid-fire evidence to hook her audience at the outset of each chapter then elaborating with solid research findings and creative argumentation. Time and again, she concludes each chapter by illustrating the larger point that we are allowing media-fueled fear of pop culture to deflect our attention from the real social problems that spring from economic disparities. With a lively perspective that promises to ignite critical thinking in student readers—and possibly their parents, too—Sternheimer's work delivers a multi-faceted exploration of structure and agency under the influence of commercialism and media. Her book would make an outstanding addition to a wide range of undergraduate sociology courses.

BOOK REVIEW

***Sorry I Don't Dance: Why Men Refuse to Move*, by Maxine Leeds Craig. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013, 240 pages, \$24.95 Paper. ISBN: 9780199845293.**

EMILY MORROW JONES
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Maxine Leeds Craig's book *Sorry I Don't Dance: Why Men Refuse to Move* is a compelling exploration of class, race, gender, and sexuality in the context of embodied masculinity in men who dance and men who will not. As the title suggests, she explains that it is not that men *cannot* dance, but that they refuse to do so within the confinements of their masculine and heteronormative socialization. Craig takes an historical and sociological stance on understanding the phenomena of dance in men's lives. Using historical documents, her own personal anecdotes, and interview data with fifty men, she creates a strong and seamless narrative about how dance has been constructed around masculinities and femininities.

She begins her examination in the first part of the book by looking at both historical fiction and public media such as advertisements and newspaper articles to understand how dance has been constructed in the American male's life from the late 1800's onward. Through these historical records, she is able to weave a story of how masculinity is both fluid and fixed over time, particularly around men's embodiment and dance, and how these fluctuations in masculinity have been influenced by the social constructions of class, race, and sexuality combined.

The second part of the book begins exploring specifically how sex, sexuality, and dance create a specific interaction in men's lives

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to encourage or discourage them from dancing. In this section, it is specifically helpful for the reader when she employs the theorization of the “male gaze” and how men must work to avoid the male gaze to ensure both their masculinity and heteronormativity. The male gaze is a specific cultural-political lens in patriarchal society in which women are viewed as first and foremost their bodies. What is more, this gaze ensures that the female body is objectified as spectacle for the more dominant viewer, which is typically male. However, Craig explains that even men must work to avoid this gaze in order not to appear sexy to other men, which would break the codes of heteronormativity. Examining how sex and dance are intertwined in the social fabric of American life, Craig explains how the codes of masculinity, race, and class dictate a man’s participation or non-participation in dance.

The range of sources that Craig draws on is impressive and cuts a wide swath through cultural and sociological artifacts and accounts of dance. This text would be useful for any gender and/or culture scholar that wishes examine the phenomena of dance and gender through an historical lens. Craig asserts in the beginning that “this is a book about masculinity and everyday dance,” (pg 4) and she does fulfill her task in that way. While not everything can be accomplished in one text, she seeks to explain how race is a factor in the intersection of gender, sexuality, and class identity around dance, yet her main explorations are in Black and White men’s lives. Only some accounts of other racial identities are presented.

There are other possible explanations for the non-dancing of men besides gender and sexuality. She does not attempt to understand comparatively the West/non-West culture of dancing and how gender and sexuality affect the participation of men in other societal traditions. Tied to this, the effect that religion may play in men’s (and women’s) non participation in dance should be noted. How has the American tradition of Puritanism (and the strict no-dancing many of the religious observe) affected the participation of men and women? While these questions were not the driving force of her sociological inquiry, these are other possibilities that may confound the issue of men and participation in dance.

This book is a well written, informative, and theoretically fresh addition to the literature on culture, gender, sexuality, and embodiment. The theorists that Craig draws from are both contemporary and poignant gender and culture theorists such as Bourdieu, Wacquant, Connell, Messerschmidt, and West and Zimmerman, among others. In line with other embodiment theorists, the book is also structured around the sociological tradition of thought regarding social interaction and its effects. Theories of embodiment seek to understand how the body is both a source and a location for society, and Craig explains in her text how gender norms constrict men's bodily movement, but also how men either dance or do not dance, which propels patterns of gendered engagement in the social world. Craig uses her sociological lens carefully and with exacting measure, but writes in a very accessible way so that scholars of other disciplines may enjoy the book. This text is sharp enough for graduate seminars but also compelling enough for an undergraduate course on culture, gender, and/or sexuality.