ALTRUISM, MORALITY, AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY FORUM

The Newsletter of the AMSS Section of the American Sociological Association
SPRING 2020

From the Chair's Desk

Kraig Beyerlein, University of Notre Dame

Dear AMSS Section Members,

As all of you know, we are living in extremely challenging and difficult times. COVID-19 is surging in communities, taking the lives of so many. Racism's lethality continues—for example, in the recent killing of George Floyd by police and the disproportionate number of people of color who have died from COVID-19. And government action intensifies against those seeking social justice.

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Meeting together in San Francisco would have provided the opportunity for us to not only collectively grieve the state of the world, but also to mobilize responses as we draw on each other and our work. It is unfortunate, then, that we will not have this opportunity. With that said, I hope that the ASA's Alternative Virtual Engagement Event—particularly our section's sessions—will provide inspiration to press on for the common good and to fight social oppression in all forms.

To that end, Trish Snell Herzog (chair-elect) has organized the following invited panel, which has been posted online for viewing—"Generosity, Morality, and Altruism: Global Studies in Cross-Cultural Values." Dana Moss (council member) has put together our section's regular session, "Understanding the Good in a World Gone Bad." This will be a live online session, taking place on Saturday, August 8 from 10:30 AM to 12:10 PM PDT.

Along with the Evolution, Biology, and Society and Medical Sociology sections, our section is jointly sponsoring this session, "On Human Nature: New Approaches in the 21st Century" on Tuesday, August 11 from 11:10 AM to 12:10 PM PDT. Please see instructions below (page 3) for joining sessions.

The jointly-sponsored panel (with the Association of the Sociology of Religion) for Robert Braun's "Protectors of Pluralism"—which won our section's best book award—will be held virtually sometime in the early fall (specific details forthcoming).

Congratulations to our newly elected council members (see page 5) and award winners (see page 6). Thanks to everyone who ran for these positions and/or submitted their research for consideration. Also, I cannot thank the members of the various awards committees enough for their serve to our section! See this link for a video for our awards ceremony, which chair-elect Trish Snell Herzog coordinated/organized (a huge round of applause to her for doing this!).

In closing, it has been a pleasure to be the chair of the AMSS section over the last year. I have greatly benefitted from the sound advice and insightful ideas from other council members and the broader membership, thoroughly enjoying our collaboration. I am even more convinced now that our section brings a unique perspective to bear on sociological analysis. At the same time, more work is needed to increase the size and diversity of section (see statement on page 3). Please continue to share your thoughts about how we can improve our section.

In Solidarity,
Kraig

Joining Section Sessions at the Virtual Engagement Event

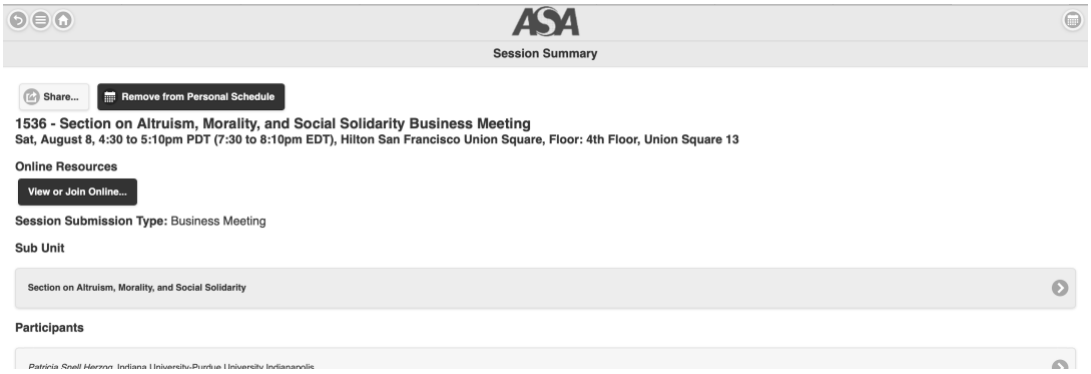
The fully virtual American Sociological Association annual meeting will be meeting online on August 8-11, the Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity section (AMSS) is hosting virtual engagement events, as mentioned in the Chair's Letter.

Please be sure to join the AMSS Section Business Meeting. This event will be live on Saturday, August 8th at 4:30pm-5:10pm PDT (7:30pm-8:10pm EDT).

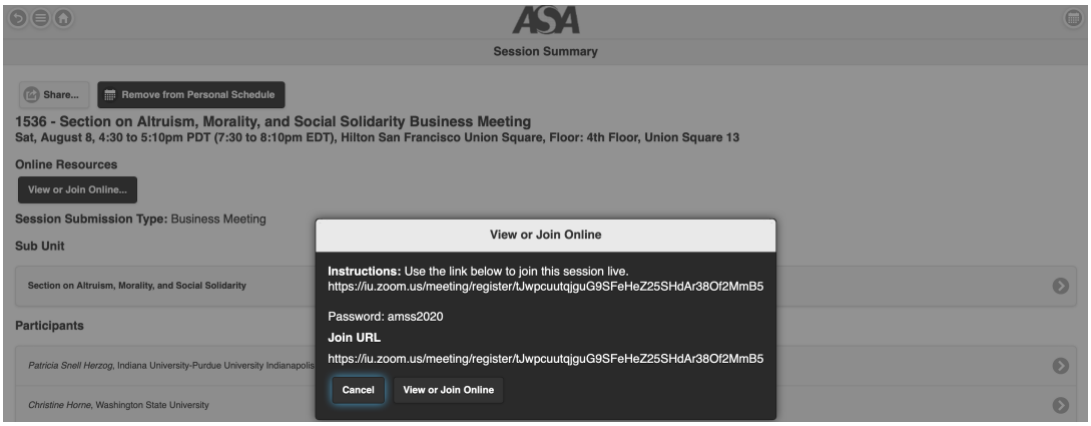
Joining section events

Please be sure to register (for free) for the Virtual Engagement Event on the ASA website - this will grant you access to the online access information for each session. Register at this link. To access the online session information after you have registered, you first need to log in to your ASA account. Once logged in, click on "Virtual Engagement Portal" listed under the Annual Meeting header, and then click "View the Online Program" to search for online sessions. Click on the session you wish you join.

In the session details page, click “View or Join Online:



A new window will appear with Zoom meeting information. Click “View or Join Online” at the bottom of this window to be directed to the online meeting:



Statement on Diversity and Inclusion and Call to Action

We want to convey our gratitude to all those who volunteered for election this year, congratulate the winners, and simultaneously issue this call to action. Thank you for your willingness to serve the section and help AMSS continue to improve in the years ahead.

It is notable this year that all election winners for the AMSS section were male. As context, the current gender composition of AMSS council is generally balanced (7 women and 5 men), with the section having several female chairs and officers, but our membership does somewhat over-represent men relative to ASA as a whole. Moreover, like ASA more generally, the AMSS section under-represents the full range of voices from a truly diverse set of racial and ethnic groups as well as the LGBTQ+ community.

AMSS will address this issue by establishing a committee specifically focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion We appreciate the efforts of the section's nominating committee to recruit a wide variety of people who can contribute to the section, and we aspire to enhance these efforts with additional ideas and activities aimed at more thoroughly confronting the structural issues embedded within the ASA specifically, and the academy generally. We invite your participation in this important issue, including being part of the formal committee.

If you are interested in helping the AMSS identify ways to address diversity, equity, and inclusion, please complete this short, anonymous survey. Responses will be reviewed by the newly formed diversity, equity, and inclusion committee and help to inform the committee's efforts. To join the committee, please email the incoming section chair: Patricia Snell Herzog at psherzog@iupui.edu.

Even if your plate is already full for the coming year, we would appreciate hearing from everyone, so please do complete the short, anonymous survey when you get a chance at this link.

Kraig Beyerlein, University of Notre Dame, Chair

Patricia Snell Herzog, IUPUI, Chair-Elect

Christine Horne, Washington State University, Past Chair

Sarah Harkness, University of Iowa, Secretary/Treasurer

Matthew Baggetta, Indiana University, Council Member

Mary R. Rose, University of Texas, Council Member

Chaeyoon Lim, University of Wisconsin, Council Member

Bin Xu. Emory University, Council Member

Brad R. Fulton, Indiana University, Council Member

Dana M. Moss, University of Notre Dame, Council Member

Ji Hye Kim, University of Iowa, Student Representative

Aisha A. Upton, University of Minnesota, Student Representative

Welcome to our new section officers!

Incoming chair-elect: David Melamed is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the Ohio State University, where he is also a faculty affiliate of the Translational Data Analytics Institute. Prior to joining Ohio State, David was an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of South Carolina. He is currently Co-Editor of *Sociological Methodology* (2020-2022). His research examines how social (network) structures shape aggregate patterns of prosocial behavior between people, and the implications of segregation and inequality for prosociality. Some of his other research examines how status processes structure inequalities in small groups. Some of this work has appeared in venues such as *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *Social Networks*, and *Science Advances*.

Incoming council member: Gary J. Adler, Jr. (@GaryAdlerJr) is Assistant Professor of Sociology, Affiliate of the Rock Ethics Institute, and Affiliate of the Social Thought Program at Pennsylvania State University. He earned his doctorate in 2012 from the University of Arizona. His research has explored how religious organizations produce transnational civic engagement and how culture shapes religious organizations' boundaries. His current project is a collaborative study of how "street level" management by religious leaders and public officials occurs in diverse contexts across the United States. His book, *Empathy Beyond U.S. Borders: The Challenges of Transnational Civil Engagement*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2019 as part of Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion, and Politics. He is the editor of *Secularism, Catholicism, and the Future of Public Life* (Oxford 2015) and co-editor of *American Parishes: Remaking Local Catholicism* (Fordham 2019).

Incoming council member: Andrew Miles is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto. His work lies at the intersection of the sociology of culture, social psychology, and moral and cognitive psychology. His research focuses on the social development of different moral cultures, the role moral constructs play in predicting behavior (e.g., values, moral identities), and the effects of moral behavior on emotions. He also studies how cognitive processes affect action and has an abiding love for learning and teaching quantitative methods.

Incoming council member: Charles Seguin is an assistant professor of sociology at Penn State. He seeks to understand the dynamics of cultural and political change and stability broadly, with a particular focus on the roles of violence and group boundaries. He has a project on the politics of lynching in the United States from 1880-1930, as well as lines of research on social movements, cultural objects, and international politics. His work has appeared in *Social Forces*, the *American Journal of Sociology*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*.

Incoming student representative (2-year term): Jered Abernathy is a sociology PhD student at the University of South Carolina. He received his MA from the University of South Carolina in 2020. Before that, he received a BA in psychology and a BS in sociology from the University of Iowa in 2016. He specializes in experimental methods utilizing both online and laboratory settings to test his hypotheses. He is interested in prosocial behavior, cooperation, and trust. Jered's M.A. thesis, "Morals 'Trump' Party: Make America Cooperate Again," focused on bridging the political trust gap between

Democrats and Republicans. He showed that emphasizing the shared values between them rather than their differences could counteract the effects of out-group bias.

Incoming student representative (1-year term): Nicholas Heiserman is a PhD candidate at the University of South Carolina specializing in social psychology and inequalities. His research interests include attitudes about economic inequality and mobility, discrimination, and intersectional stereotype content. His dissertation proposal on the latter won a 2019 Graduate Student Investigator Award from the ASA Section on Social Psychology. He has also contributed to research on generalized reciprocity in networks and is currently conducting research on the relationship between status schemas, coordination, and cohesion in small groups. His teaching experience includes statistics and research methods courses, as well as an interdisciplinary course on ethics and advocacy. He is also co-editor of the newsletter and website of the ASA Section on Social Psychology.

Incoming student representative (1-year term): Michael Rotolo is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Notre Dame. His research examines the origins, development, and outcomes of different moral worldviews. Michael's dissertation, "Seeking the Good Life: The Moral Development of Young People in America," examines how Americans develop their sociopolitical views, religious views, and aspirations, drawing primarily on interview data with young people collected over the course of 10 years from adolescence to young adulthood. He is the co-author of *Religious Parenting: Transmitting Faith and Values in Contemporary America* (Princeton University Press, 2020). His current work also examines how young Americans develop Christian nationalist views. Michael has a B.A. in Religious Studies from UNC, an M.Div from Princeton Theological Seminary, and an M.A. in Sociology from Notre Dame.

Congratulations to our award winners!

The virtual awards ceremony is available on our website!

AMSS Distinguished Career Award:

Jeffery C. Alexander, Yale University

Distinguished Book Award

Winner: Braun, Robert. 2019. *Protectors of Pluralism: Religious Minorities and the Rescue of Jews in the Low Countries during the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Honorable Mention: Adler, Gary J. 2019. *Empathy Beyond US Borders: The Challenges of Transnational Civic Engagement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Honorable Mention: Livne, Roi. 2019. *Values at the End of Life: The Logic of Palliative Care*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

Outstanding Published Article Award

Winner: Barbara Kiviat, "The Moral Limits of Predictive Practices: The Case of Credit-Based Insurance Scores," *American Sociological Review*, 84(6):1134-1158, 2019.

Honorable Mention: Shai M. Dromi and Samuel D. Stabler, "Good on Paper: Sociological Critique, Pragmatism, and Secularization Theory," *Theory and Society*, 48:325-50, 2019.

Best Graduate Student Paper

Co-Winners: "A Little Help from my Friends? Resolving Moral Tension between Meritocracy and Job-seeking Help," by Laura Adler and Elena Ayala-Hurtado of Harvard University and Julia Weiss of Heidelberg University

Co-Winners: ""I Know How It Feels": Empathy and Child Maltreatment Non-Reporting Among Low-Income Mothers," by Kelley Fong, Harvard.

Why Individual Solutions to Public Health Problems Won't Work

by Jennifer Reich, University of Colorado-Denver

"I am a Type I Diabetic. The experts say I am in high risk categories related to Covid-19. Here is what I pledge to you. I pledge to stay home and take responsibility for my own health. I pledge to stay home so YOU are able to earn a paycheck! I pledge to stay home so YOU are able to open your business no matter how big or small! I pledge to stay home so YOU are able to put a roof over your family's head! I pledge to stay home so YOU are able to put a food on your family's table! I pledge to stay home so YOU can send your children back to school!"

-- Patrick

This post was part of an online discussion among members of one of the many online forums that formed to protest stay-at-home orders and calls to wear masks in public. It in many ways illustrates so many of the issues we grapple with in sociology and in our section as we try to make sense of what we mean by social solidarity and altruism, and how we understand how individuals make moral decisions that affect others as much as ourselves.

For months now, Americans have been grappling with how to manage risks of infection with SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that has caused the COVID-19 outbreak. By April 7, 42 states had stay-at-home orders, which asked residents to avoid social contact that could spread disease and ordered the closures of countless businesses. Nearly all states, as of May 18, have ordered those leaving home to wear masks or face coverings. About 10 states require masks in all situations; about another 26 states require that workers and patrons in "essential businesses" wear them while on the premises; and fourteen states recommend them, but do not require them. Cities and states enforce these orders

inconsistently and penalties vary dramatically. Nonetheless, the orders aim to enact a collective solution to a public health problem.

As emergency public health orders have gone into effect and subsequently been relaxed, we are seeing, at core, an argument about why we are doing what we are doing and disagreement about who these orders are meant to protect. This is relatively unsurprising. As my research and that of many others have shown, Americans over the past several decades have accepted that individual behaviors and personal responsibility can ensure good health. A wide range of voices—from magazines to health monitoring apps and watches to primary care providers to family and friends—insist that good health is the result of hard work, determination, and good decisions and that sickness is often a personal failure. This approach to health ignores the reality that the majority of illness is beyond individual control. When it comes to infectious disease, this individualistic attachment to personal responsibility perpetuates the myth that each of us can manage risk through vigilance. In my research on why parents reject vaccines for their children, parents told me repeatedly that individual consumption choices, alongside vigilant supervision and deliberate decisions about who their children interact with, render vaccines unnecessary. Vaccines, they told me, were one option alongside a wide range of health optimization strategies that they could accept or reject based on whether they perceived they needed them (spoiler: they most often rejected them).

Stay-at-home orders and state orders to cover our faces when entering public places are not intended to be personal optimization strategies. They are instead community efforts to protect others, particularly those who most need protecting. Cloth facial coverings will not singularly prevent an individual who wears it from becoming infected, and is most effective when used with social distancing and other containment strategies. Instead, masks are a low-tech way of reducing the chances that the person wearing the mask, particularly a person who might be infected but does not show symptoms or yet know they are infected, exposes others to the virus. As New York's Governor Cuomo explained, "When you wear a mask, you say, 'I respect you.'"

Protecting others in public is not a minor goal, which becomes evident when considering the huge number of grocery store workers, public transport operators, delivery people, custodians, doormen, healthcare providers, and other essential workers who have become infected with covid-19—some of who have died. Even for those not infected, there are clear indications that the stress of the work and fear of anticipated healthcare costs is taking a toll. Relying on others—many of whom you do not know personally—is also not a minor thing. Instead, it reveals the complex ways we share communities, resources, and also risk.

Stay-at-home and social distancing orders also aim to protect others, not just the individual practicing the behaviors. They do so, in part, by ensuring we can spread healthcare resources to all those who most need them. When people across the U.S. were asked to stay home in order to "flatten the curve," the goal was to slow community spread so that fewer people would be infected at any given time. Rather than prevent infection entirely, slowing infection would allow health systems to function without becoming overwhelmed. Despite concerns about capacity and arguments about how to ration resources, nearly all cities were able to manage the pace of hospitalizations. As one cynical meme suggests of the lifting of these orders, "The end of stay at home orders doesn't mean the pandemic is over. It means they currently have room for you in the ICU."

Social distancing helps individuals avoid some personal risk. However, not all people are equally at risk for hospitalization or death. Although we continue to learn more about this virus—one we did not even know existed a few months ago—some patterns are emerging. Though people of all ages have died of infection, older people and those with underlying health conditions are at greatest risk of the worst outcomes, and men die at higher rates than do women. As such, personal decisions about how much risk to take and how seriously to treat public health precautions are not entirely individual choices.

Patrick's post (above) promising to stay home so others may move freely was met, unsurprisingly, with enthusiastic support. "This is being a true selfless American!! Amazing." Others called Patrick a "true Patriot." Many voiced gratitude and offered him assistance in return: "Well said Patrick and very much appreciated. Please let US know if we can do anything to help you in anyway." Yet the conversation revolved entirely around the belief that Patrick—or anyone else—could say precisely what he needed to be safe and that others could live unencumbered, so long as high-risk neighbors like Patrick stayed home.

People like Patrick who are most vulnerable to the worst outcomes of infection may vow to stay at home so others may go out freely. Nonetheless, their health remains inextricably and often invisibly linked to the personal choices of others in the community. Whether the virus is delivered to someone's doorstep or whether rising rates of infection block access to much-needed healthcare resources in the future is not an individual question and does not have individual answers, irrespective of what anyone pledges online.

Jennifer Reich *is a Professor at the Sociology Department at CU Denver. Her recent book,* Calling the Shots: Why Parents Reject Vaccines *(NYU Press) won the Section on Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity Best Book Award in 2017.*

The Ties that Bind
by Lori Peek, CU Boulder

Where to begin when the world feels so upended? In a matter of three months, **COVID-19** has spread to nearly every part of our globe. Hundreds of thousands have fallen ill, while thousands more—many of them **poor, elderly, or with underlying health concerns**—have succumbed to the disease. Schools are closed and businesses shuttered. Travel has nearly ground to a halt as nations secure their borders and people hunker down, trying to shield themselves from subsequent shocks to our collective system.

What holds society together during times like these?

This is the question that the founding thinkers in sociology posed in response to the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and other historical moments of profound upheaval. They were concerned then, as we remain now, in identifying how social institutions—the family, government, economy, education, and religion—interconnect and ultimately uphold or alter the existing social order. The visible structures associated with those institutions comprise the physical spaces where we live, learn, work, and worship.

But the **sociological imagination** has always focused on the invisible forces—the shared norms and values, the emotional connections, the relationships—that bind us together and ultimately make social life possible.

It is no wonder that sociologists and other social and behavioral scientists have long been interested in the **study of disasters**. These events have the potential, if examined closely, to reveal important truths about our society, the times we live in, and ourselves. Disasters often strip away the outer layer of the social formations they crash into, and in doing so unearth a view of what is going on, down in the core of things.

Over the years, researchers have made important discoveries about how personal and collective capacity can be strengthened in disasters. Thomas Drabek and Enrico Quarantelli **once argued**, for example, that "disasters often bring out the best in individuals. Ability to endure suffering, desire to help others, and acts of courage and generosity come forth in times of crisis." The earliest disaster researchers were so struck by these dynamics that they coined terms such as "altruistic community" and "therapeutic social system" to depict the mutual helpfulness and social solidarity that they repeatedly observed.

When events unfold that disrupt the social order, most of us search for solace among our fellow human beings. The COVID-19 pandemic has been no different. **Kindness** has remained in full view as this crisis unfolds, as has human ingenuity. We have found creative and novel ways to be together and to offer love and support, even as we are told to stay away from each other. The need for **social distancing** is an imperative in this crisis, but so too is our need to find ways to remain in community with others.

As we celebrate the strength of social bonds and the power of social connection, we must also never take these forces for granted. Such bonds are created through socialization and relationships, which also means that these webs of humanity can be diminished through destructive processes. Just as Drabek and Quarantelli highlighted the good in disaster, they also cautioned that "disasters can evoke the worst in persons—a relentless search for scapegoats to blame for destruction and loss of life," although they do point out that "this tendency to seek the cause in a who—rather than a what—is most common after catastrophes not caused naturally."

Of course, it is not only the disaster agent that determines the response. The condition of our **social fabric** does that as well. Our social bonds become tattered and frayed when they are not carefully tended to. Our social institutions become corroded and destabilized when we do not invest in the people, programs, and infrastructure that make them possible.

This is the time for us to take the positive lessons from past disasters, as well as to heed cautionary findings. What each one of us does in the coming hours and days matters. Listening to scientists and taking recommended protective actions like washing our hands and limiting gatherings matters. Spending on healthcare and programs like paid sick leave, unemployment benefits, and food stamps that **aid people in distress** matters. Supporting others and seeing ourselves as part of a **broader whole** matters. Each of these steps, when taken together, will save lives.

This is the moment for us to recognize our interdependence and to recommit to our collective sense of responsibility to one another. In recognizing this responsibility, we must know that we already have

the answer inside of us to the question posed earlier: What holds society together during a time like this?

We do.

***Lori Peek** is professor in the Department of Sociology and director of the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado Boulder. She studies vulnerable populations in disaster and is author of* Behind the Backlash: Muslim Americans after 9/11, *co-editor of* Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora, *and co-author of* Children of Katrina. Behind the Backlash *received the Best Book Award from the American Sociological Association Section on Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity*.

Member Publications and Publications of Interest

Altomonte, Guillermina. "Exploiting Ambiguity: A Moral Polysemy Approach to Variation in Economic Practices." *American Sociological Review* 85, no. 1 (2020): 76–105.

Baker, Will. "The moral attitudes of UK youth: bringing morality back to the sociology of education." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (2020, online ahead of print).

Dabrowski, Vicki. "'Neoliberal Feminism': Legitimising the Gendered Moral Project of Austerity." *The Sociological Review* (2020, online ahead of print).

De Keere, Kobe. "Finding the moral space: Rethinking morality, social class and worldviews." *Poetics* 79 (2020, online ahead of print).

Luft, Aliza. Theorizing Moral Cognition: Culture in Action, Situations, and Relationships." *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 6 (2020):1-15.

Luft, Aliza. "Religion in Vichy France: How Meso-Level Actors Contribute to Authoritarian Legitimation." European Journal of Sociology 61, no. 1 (2020): 1-35.

Luft, Aliza. "Three Stories and Three Questions about Participation in Genocide." *Journal of Perpetrator Research* 3, no. 1 (2020), 196-206.

Robinson, Candice C. *"*(Re)theorizing civic engagement: Foundations for Black Americans civic engagement theory." *Sociology Compass*, 13, no. 9 (2019).

Robinson, Candice C. *"*Black Middle Class Interpretations of Civic Engagement." *Issues in Race and Society: An Interdisciplinary Global Journal: Special Issue on the Global Black Middle Class,* 9, no. 1 (2020).

Siviş, Selin. Negotiating moral boundaries through the lens of employers: Syrians in the Turkish informal economy, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2020, online ahead of print).

Congratulations

Section member Owen Abbott's new book The Self, Relational Sociology, and Morality in Practice won the British Sociological Association Philip Abrams Memorial Prize, which is awarded for the best first and solo authored book within the discipline of Sociology.

Outgoing council members

Last but certainly not least, thank you to our outgoing section council members, Matthew Baggetta, Christine Horne, Ji Hye Kim, Chaeyoon Lim, Dana Moss, Aisha Upton, Michael Wood!

We wish you and yours a healthy and restful summer!
Looking forward to seeing you virtually very soon,
and in person in August 2021 in Chicago!