Fall 2017 Volume 8, Number 3

# ALTRUISM, MORALITY, AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY FORUM

The Newsletter of the AMSS Section of the American Sociological Association



## From the Chair's Desk

*Pam Paxton, University of Texas - Austin*

Dear members of the Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity section,

The ASA meeting in Montreal was a great success with our session, a session co-sponsored with Rationality and Society, roundtables, and a set of outstanding awardees. I want to thank Jan Stets for her leadership of the section and everyone who worked to make the ASA meeting and this past year a success. I also want to thank Beau Weston for editing our newsletter for the past five years. We are looking forward to our next meeting in Philadelphia!

In September, in a creative bid to increase membership, the Rationality and Society Section acted as first mover by having eight members join our section and asking us to reciprocate. As second mover, we did reciprocate -- thanks to everyone who joined R&S. They obviously picked the right section for their experiment.

In this issue of the newsletter you will find information on our 2017 awardees, a farewell from outgoing newsletter editor Beau Weston, and several ways to connect with other AMSS members such as our webinar series. Please note in particular how to submit to our new "on the job market" section.

I'm happy to have a home for my research on pro-social behavior, trust, and nonprofits. Connecting with others who share the same research interests has enriched and enlivened my work. I will work during the coming year to advance our section. If you ever have an idea to improve AMSS, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Best,
Pam

# Award Winners

**Distinguished Career Award**: Lynn Smith-Lovin, *Duke University*

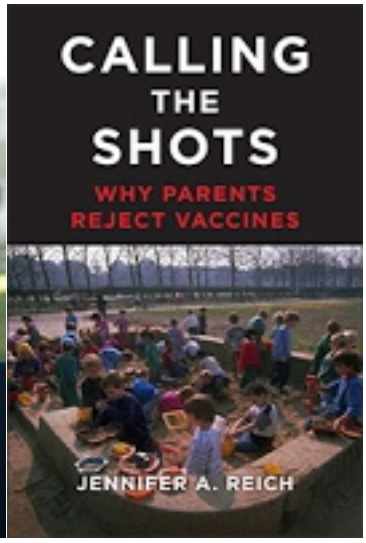
From the award committee: "Lynn Smith-Lovin, the Robert L. Wilson Professor of Sociology at Duke University is the recipient of the 2017 Distinguished Career Award for the ASA section on Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity. Two principle lines of empirical and theoretical work by Professor Smith-Lovin were felt by the Award's committee to merit this award.

One prominent line of research is Smith-Lovin's long-term, collaborative effort to extend Affect Control Theory emphasizing that actors assess their own self and identity, the identities of others, the behaviors of both self and others, and the situation along several fundamental dimensions: evaluation, potency, and activity. In so doing individuals draw upon broader cultural beliefs forming fundamental sentiments and compare these to their transition impressions about self, others, and behaviors in a particular setting, with inconsistencies increasing the arousal of emotions and motivating individuals to bring fundamental sentiments and transient impression back into line. By implication, these dynamics can have large effects on individuals' capacity to develop solidarities in situation, to moralize self, others, and situations, and, potentially, to exhibit pro-social and altruistic behaviors to others in situations that, in turn, increase social solidarity.

The second prominent line of research is professor Smith-Lovin's collaborate research on the power of situational locations of self and others in networks to affect individuals' pro-social responses to others and situations, their emotional well-being, and even their levels of health and longevity. This widely cited work underscores the power of social structures to determine the emotions that generate altruism, morality, and solidarity.

These lines of research are, the Awards committee felt, fundamental to the goals of AMSS because they outline some of the cultural, social psychological, and structural dynamics that constrain or activate altruism, morality, and social solidarity."

**Outstanding Published Book Award**:
Jennifer Reich, *University of Colorado, Denver* for *Calling the Shots: Why Parents Reject Vaccines* (2016, New York: New York University Press).




When I started studying parents who refuse to consent to some or all vaccines for their children, I was most interested in understanding how individuals make decisions about law and policy in their daily lives. I did not anticipate that it would take me nearly a decade to understand their perspectives and how they weigh information about science, risk, and what it means to be a good parent to make what they see as the best decision for their family.

Vaccine decisions are at the heart of what it means to be altruistic. Although vaccines are marketed as a technology of self-protection, many of the diseases they protect against are actually of greatest risk to others in the community. The vaccine against rubella (German measles), which was licensed in the US in 1969, provides a particularly compelling example. Rubella is a minor illness for the person infected, causing a rash, low fever, and symptoms resembling a bad cold that usually last a few days. Yet when a pregnant woman becomes infected, her fetus faces risks of major birth defects, including blindness, deafness, heart damage, cataracts, internal organ damage, and intellectual disability. In a particularly bad outbreak in 1964-65, more than 12 million people were infected with rubella and an estimated 20,000 babies were born with congenital rubella syndrome. Without a vaccine, there was nothing their mothers could have done to prevent it.

The rubella vaccine—and how to administer it—was not without controversy. Ultimately, public health advocates determined that while it was intended to protect fetuses, giving it only to girls and women who might become pregnant would be ineffective in creating community levels of protection. Rather, they adopted a universal immunization plan where all young children—who are most likely to come into contact with pregnant women—would be inoculated.

The controversy then, as today, lies in the unresolvable reality that all medical interventions, including vaccines, inevitably carry some risk. Though the rubella vaccine is exceedingly safe, it can cause mild symptoms that last a few days, and occasionally, more serious reactions. Yet the rarity of adverse reaction from the vaccine, stacked against the widespread damage of congenital rubella syndrome led to a clear public policy mandate and individual willingness to accept it. The rubella vaccine introduced the possibility that we could ask individuals to absorb minute risk to protect the most vulnerable members of the community, in this case, the unborn.

In doing so, Americans defined a culture of shared responsibility and shared benefit.

In my recent book, *Calling the Shots: Why Parents Reject Vaccines*, I describe the histories of and controversies surrounding different vaccines, and how parents make decisions about them. How do they, for example, embrace a vaccine against tetanus, which is not contagious and thus, is entirely for individual benefit, or reject one against chicken pox, which they do not see as a serious disease? How do parents understand the outcome of a measles outbreak at Disneyland that affects a child in remission for cancer in Arizona? What does it mean when the father of an unvaccinated child pens an open letter to the parent of a child with cancer justifying his unrelenting opposition to vaccinating his own child, insisting, "It's an unfortunate thing that people die, but people die. I'm not going to put my child at risk to save another child."

Parents who refuse vaccines are often described in popular press as selfish, ignorant, or delusional. Comparing these parents' views to the body of scientific evidence suggests they tend to overestimate the risks of serious adverse reactions to vaccines, which are about one in a million for most vaccines (and as high as one in four for minor reactions like fever and pain at the injection site), and underestimate the seriousness of vaccine-preventable diseases. Yet, rather than simply dismissing them as wrongheaded or ill-informed, I instead find that parents work hard to make informed decisions for their children. They see themselves as good people, often involved in their churches and communities, or embracing progressive politics and lifestyle choices geared toward sustainability. They are often surprised and hurt by the vitriol hurled at them on social media or even within their own extended families.

In my research, I show how parents—most often mothers—are in many ways responding logically to cultural norms that require them to take full responsibility for all their children's failures, harms, risks, and to a lesser degree, successes. This culture of what I term individualist parenting asks parents to make perfect choices about schools, activities, and developmental opportunities for their children. Combined with norms that treat health and disease risk as entirely individually manageable (with, for example, fitness trackers, calorie logs, exercise, and preventative care), parents take their sense of their individual responsibility for their children's health seriously. The result is that parents adopt extensive strategies to manage vaccine decisions for their own children, but do so without a sense of responsibility for others in the community who may be most vulnerable.

It is worth noting that distrust of vaccines is not all that unusual. Although few parents opt out of all vaccines, as many as 20-25% of American parents say they are intentionally delaying or refusing some vaccines and substituting their own judgment for those of the experts who review hundreds of studies to design federal vaccine schedules. Parents who opt out are also most likely to be white, have a college education, and have a higher income. In contrast, those children most likely to be missing vaccines because of lack of consistent access to care are most likely to be poor, have a mother with no more than a high school education, and to be a child of color. In these ways, the culture of individualist parenting is affecting all of us, with those who are already most vulnerable to poor health outcomes and lack of resources to seek care potentially placed at the greatest risk.

In writing about parents' views, which I place in dialog with those of pediatricians, lawyers, researchers, and policy makers, I hope to change the terms of the discussion about vaccine refusal from one that dismisses parents as have personal shortcomings that lead them to opt out of community health to one where we can begin to ask how we can all make sure everyone's children are protected and healthy, even if it means accepting some personal risk for the good of the many.

*Jennifer Reich is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Colorado Denver. She earned her doctorate in 2002 from the University of California Davis and completed a post-doctoral fellowship in health policy at the University of California San Francisco. Her research examines how individuals and families strategize their interactions with the state and service providers in the context of public policy, particularly as they relate to health and welfare. Her book,* Calling the Shots: Why Parents Reject Vaccines (NYU Press 2016)*, received the* 2017 Outstanding Published Book Award *from the Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity Section.*

**Outstanding Published Article Award**:
Robert Braun, *Northwestern University* for "Religious Minorities and Resistance to Genocide: The Collective Rescue of Jews in the Netherlands during the Holocaust." *American Political Science Review* 119 (1) 127-147.


200 kilometers from the Dutch capital Amsterdam, in the region of Twente, lie the medium sized villages Almelo and Borne. Before the outbreak of World War Two, Almelo and Borne had a similar socio-cultural outlook. The population in both cities was relatively prosperous and labored in local textile factories. Ever since the turn of the nineteenth century, the villages were home to sizable Jewish communities. During the German occupation both communities faced similar challenges and underwent identical structural transformations. From 1941 onwards, Jews were no longer allowed to take part in public life. After being segregated socially and spatially, German officers, helped by local policemen, started organizing roundups to track down Jewish inhabitants and send them to the infamous extermination camps in Eastern. Despite the socio-cultural similarity of the two villages, outcomes of these roundups differed fundamentally. In Almelo, numerous Jews were able to evade deportation with the help of Catholic Church Chaplains Bodde and Middelkoop who temporarily sheltered Jews in the Saint Gregorius Church before housing them with loyal members of their parish. As a result, forty-two percent of the Jews in Almelo survived the war. Despite the presence of three Catholic congregations, no successful rescue network emerged in neighboring Borne. Consequently, only twenty-two percent of the Jewish population escaped.

This raises an important question. Why are some religious communities willing and able to protect victims of mass persecution while others are not? It is important to note that this question is not only pertinent to how the Holocaust played out in the Netherlands. Throughout occupied Europe, Church leadership proved crucial for the emergence of defense movements that arrested the Holocaust by enabling Jewish evasion. Needless to say, the Holocaust's eleven million victims attest to the reality that religious help was far from universal. The importance of

this question also travels well beyond the borders of Holocaust studies, as puzzling variation in religious resistance to violence abounds within conflicts, nations and denominations across time and space. While clerics were key in creating defense movements that tried to protect Tutsis from Hutu massacres in the Rwandan region of Bigihu, religious help was almost absent in the rest of the country. Christian protests prevented the escalation of violence in Kenya and South Africa, while its absence facilitated killings of Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia. Likewise, Islamic leadership was a mobilizing force of genocide against Christians in the Ottoman empire and Darfur, but created pockets of protection for Tutsis in Rwanda. In the United States, Protestantism was used to both legitimize and oppose the repression of African-Americans. Even on an individual level, social psychologists have shown that religious inspiration can provide the normative justification for humanitarian assistance, passivity, and violence.

Existing explanations of religions and genocide that focus on national leaders or denomination have a hard time accounting for these patterns. The central argument of my book project is that local religious minorities are more likely to protect victims of mass persecution. Two distinct but partly reinforcing mechanisms link minority status to rescue operations. The first mechanism focuses on the capacity to rescue. Minorities are better equipped to translate opposition to genocide into action because they have an advantage in setting up clandestine networks that are immune to individual betrayal. This mechanism derives from the fact that minority enclaves are embedded in isolated hubs of commitment which assure members that covert mobilization is possible.

The second mechanism zeros in on the willingness to resist genocide. Aristotle, Homer, and Rousseau taught us long ago that compassion is largely a function of understanding the shared vulnerability of human beings and recognizing that what happens to others can easily befall ourselves. As religious minorities themselves depend on pluralism for group survival, they will be more likely to empathize with those targeted by violent purification campaigns, imbuing their networks with preferences to oppose genocide.

The validity of this argument is assessed by looking at the Christian rescue of Jews in the Low Countries. The dynamic religious landscape of this region – located on the fault line between Rome and Reformation - allows me to explore the importance of minority protection while keeping national and denominational factors constant. A wide range of pre-war media, war-time administrative data, clandestine newspapers and post-war testimonies are deployed to assess both the capacity and willingness to help of religious communities.

My paper, published in the *APSR*, forms a small part of this project. It combines German registration lists of Jews with commemoration books to construct an individual level database of Jewish evasion. Based on address information this data was paired with information on church buildings. Spatial econometrical analysis show that Jews living close to Protestant churches were more likely to evade deportation in Catholic areas, while the reverse was true in Protestant towns. In other parts of the project, I show that this pattern can be explained by the fact that minorities were more likely to identify with Jews, were more effective in initiating clandestine networks and once they did were less likely to get arrested. Moreover, minority protection was prevalent in almost all other parts of Nazi-Occupied Europe as well as other episodes of mass killing. Taken together this underlines that it is the local position of church communities –and nothing inherent to any denomination or leadership structure - that produces networks of assistance to threatened neighbors.

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*Robert Braun is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Political Science at Northwestern University. He combines archival work with geographical information systems to study civil society and intergroup relationships in times of social upheaval. His research has been published in the* American Political Science

Review, Journal of Conflict Resolution, Comparative Political Studies, Journal of Peace Research, Mobilization, International Journal of Comparative Sociology, European Sociological Review *and* International Sociology.

**Honorable Mention**:

Ashley Harrell, *University of Michigan* and Brent Simpson, *University of South Carolina* for "The Dynamics of Prosocial Leadership: Power and Influence in Collective Action Groups." *Social Forces* 94(3): 1283-1308.

**Putting Power in the Right Hands: Prosocial Leadership in Collective Action Groups**
*Ashley Harrell,* University of Michigan, Department of Organizational Studies

Collective action problems are a ubiquitous part of social life, ranging from everyday problems such as productivity in small work teams to nations organizing to come to terms on international trade agreements. Given their pervasiveness, much past work in a variety of disciplines has considered how to solve collective action problems – how do we motivate people to put aside their self-interest for the good of the group?

In the lab, the "gold standard" solution to collective action problems has centered on the introduction of peer sanctions, where all can punish (or reward) all – and can do so to the same extent. But in the real-world groups and organizations to which we belong, the ability to administer sanctions is typically centralized in a single individual or role-occupant, rather than distributed equally among all group members. We grant special power to, for instance, managers to award or deny raises and bonuses to workers, or to our judicial system to administer fines and penalties to citizens.

My work, then, set out to address *group leadership* as an alternative solution to collective action problems. That is, with Brent Simpson, I considered granting sole sanctioning ability to one group member – as we often do in real-world groups – rather than equally to all group members. But note that, when we give leaders an enhanced ability to sanction others, we are also giving them enhanced *power* over their non-leader group members. How do group leaders respond to this power?

There's a notion in popular culture that "power corrupts". If true, this would suggest that designating a group leader to monitor and sanction others' efforts would fail to solve collective action problems. After all, a group member with the sole ability to punish could free-ride on others' efforts with no risk of punishment, while simultaneously sanctioning those group members for engaging in similar free-riding behavior. In that sense, group leadership may not be an effective solution to collective action problems at all – after all, all group members' efforts are needed when groups are undertaking collective action.

But the literature suggests a more nuanced view of how power impacts group leaders: specifically, that those with other-regarding preferences will become *more* other-regarding when they acquire power, while those with more self-regarding preferences become more self-regarding than they were before they obtained power. This "power accentuates" approach informed our work: specifically, we tested whether prosocial individuals would increase their contributions to group efforts, while proselfs would decrease their contributions to group efforts, upon obtaining the leadership position. According to this perspective, group leadership can be an effective solution to collective action problems – so long as we "put power in the right hands" and install a prosocial leader.

We conducted a study in the lab to test these ideas, and found that group leadership *can* be a solution to collective action problems – indeed, it is even more effective than the standard solution, peer sanctions – but critically, only when the leader is prosocially oriented. Once given a leadership position, those previously classified as prosocial increased their contributions to group efforts, while those classified as proself decreased their contributions once they obtained leadership. Not only did prosocial and proself group members respond differently to receiving leadership, they also influenced their groups for the better or the worse as well: via an influence process, prosocial leaders' non-leader group members also contributed more to group goals, while proself leaders' non-leader group members followed the leader and also contributed less. Perhaps even more importantly, groups with prosocial leaders also outperformed groups utilizing the typical solution in the lab, peer sanctions.

This work suggests that prosocial leadership promises a particularly effective solution to collective action. It also yields many additional questions for future work. For instance, given that leadership is a successful solution to collective action when the leader is prosocial, do groups actually tend to select their more cooperative group members to lead? Evidence suggests that they do. But note that, if group members anticipate that they could obtain a valuable leadership position by behaving prosocially during interactions with potential voters, this could promote *strategic cooperation*: competing for leadership by behaving prosocially when it can enhance the likelihood of obtaining the leader position. I am currently collecting data on this competition-for-leadership effect; preliminary evidence suggests that people do compete for leadership, such that groups that hold democratic elections for leadership are more likely to induce cooperative behavior in their members, even before the election takes place.

More generally, given its prominence in the groups and organizations to which we belong, the leadership solution to collective action deserves more attention, and is likely to be a promising area for future work.

**Outstanding Graduate Student Paper Award:**
Louisa Roberts, *University of South Dakota* for "Changing Global Attitudes toward Homosexuality: The Influence of Global and Region-Specific Cultures, 1981-2012."

From the award committee: "The winner of the "Outstanding Graduate Student Paper" award, Louisa Roberts, produced a fascinating piece of scholarship. In it, she shows that the globalization of Western culture, in addition to receding religiosity, is driving higher rates of acceptance of homosexuality worldwide. However, she also finds that an attitudinal gap in acceptance of homosexuality is growing between the West and other parts of the world like Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of the Middle East. She concludes with the consideration that some societies may be less receptive to the diffusion of certain globalizing cultural messages than others-- a very provocative, testable and generative hypothesis. Overall, Louisa's paper was well-written and nuanced but clear in its testing of competing theories. The findings are global in scope, and engage with an issue (discriminatory attitudes toward LGBTQ people) of enduring moral relevance."

*Louisa Roberts holds an MA in social sciences from the University of Chicago and graduates this summer with a PhD in sociology from Ohio State University. In the fall, Louisa will begin as assistant professor of sociology at the University of South Dakota. Louisa is interested in cultural discourse and the direction of movement of human beliefs about right and wrong. Louisa's paper on "Changing Global Attitudes toward Homosexuality," uses quantitative methods to analyze the relative utility of various theories for understanding worldwide cultural change. The paper is based on a chapter from her dissertation, which is entitled "The Globalization of the Acceptance of Homosexuality: Mass Opinion and National Policy."*

## New Book

*Renewal: The Inclusion of Integralism and Moral Values into the Social Sciences*
Edited by Colbert Rhodes
2017, Hamilton Books, an imprint of Rowman and Littlefield

This book offers a deep look into the moral uncertainty in the contemporary social sciences and American society. Pitirim A. Sorokin in his theory of Integralism points out the dominant super socio-cultural system in the West is based on materialism where the emphasis is on science and technology. This culture, Sorokin observes, is in a state of collapse due to the breakup of its moral values. He sees a struggle for power occurring between egoistic individuals and groups often resulting in revolutions, wars and inter-human strife. Sorokin believes a solution exists in the application of the supra-conscious intuition. An instrumentality that would enable humans

to reach the supreme moral value of creative unselfish altruism which could be shared by all cultures.

## Editorial: Farewell and Press On

As I finish my five-year term as editor of our newsletter, I am glad that the Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity section has come to be. We come to these concerns from a variety of directions. This gives us, I believe, hybrid vigor.

We also, therefore, have a harder task than most sections do of explaining what we are *about*.

For my part, I was drawn to AMSS as the best niche within the American Sociological Association to promote positive sociology. I think we are poised to develop the tools to study flourishing *communities*, as psychology has developed tools to study flourishing individuals.

I hope to bring progress on this front to our future meetings. I look forward to the different excellences that my fellow Altruists will be bringing about their concerns.

## Publish with AMSS

Present a **webinar.**
The Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity webinar series allows interested scholars from across many different ASA sections to come together in a virtual meeting room and hear presentations, research, and talks from prominent scholars and topical experts in the field in real time; all talks will happen live and be recorded. Each talk will be followed by a Q&A session with the speaker.
Contact Chelsea Rae Kelly (kellycr@uga.edu), Department of Sociology, University of Georgia.

The Publications Committee welcomes **substantive contributions** from members, such as:

* Short essays related to the theoretical and empirical focus of our section (in formal academic writing style as you would write for newsletters, 500-4,000 words preferably);
* Research notes and reflections that you would like to share (same as above);
* Reports about conferences or sessions relevant to our section (2000 words maximum);
* Reflections on teaching related to altruism, morality, and social solidarity (same as above);
* Book reviews (500-1000 words);

We also welcome **announcements** regarding publications, promotions, awards, new books, conferences, calls for papers or applications, and such.

We have a new "**On the job market**" section, where we feature ABDs and PhD's who are currently on the job market. If you would like to be featured please send us the following:

1. Current institution
2. Education (including expected PhD date for ABD's)
3. Areas of Specialization
4. [Optional] - link to website or to CV
5. Dissertation abstract or description of current research and interest (under 500 words).
6. [Optional] - Publications -- full reference and link, if available.
7. [Optional] Selected Fellowships, Grants, or Awards
8. A photo.

We also have a new **syllabus bank** on our website, where we already have a collection of syllabi relating to altruism, morality, and social solidarity in any combination, broadly conceived. Please consider sending us your own syllabi — we would welcome your contribution!

Finally, we also welcome **multimedia items**, such as links to videos of talks or sessions relevant to our section and photos from section events. These will go on our website and on our Facebook page.

When submitting your contributions, please send a copy to each of us:
beau.weston@centre.edu, smd327@fas.harvard.edu, socxuxh@nus.edu.sg.

Finally, if you haven't already, please take a moment to **visit our website** at https://sites.google.com/site/altruismmoralitysolidarity/ and to connect to our **social media**:

Like us on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/pages/ASA-Altruism-Morality-and-Social-Solidarity-Section/214016928763090

Follow us on Twitter: https://twitter.com/AMSS_Section

Follow our blog's RSS feed: https://sites.google.com/site/altruismmoralitysolidarity/blog/posts.xml

We look forward to hearing from you!

Beau, Xiaohong, and Shai.