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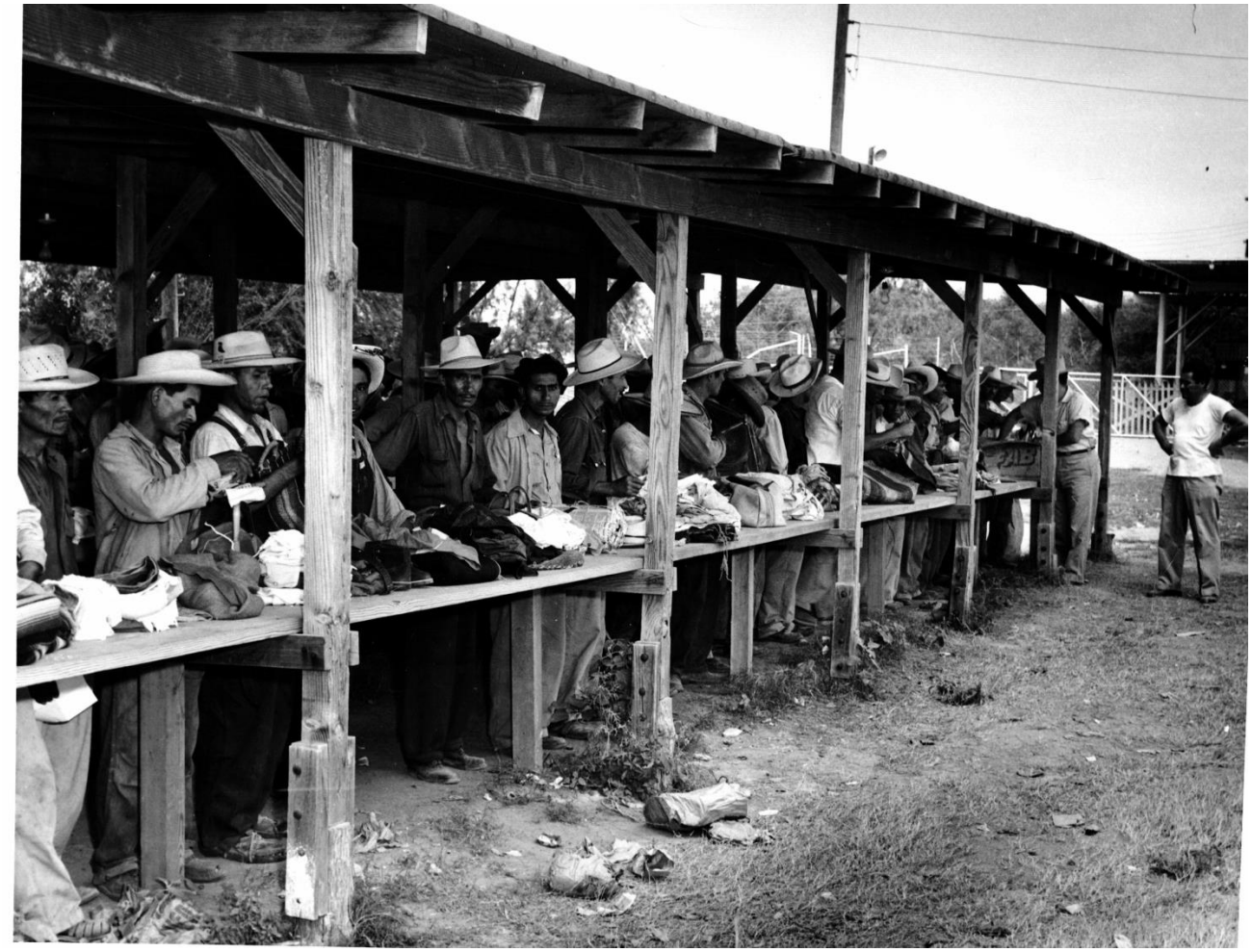

On the Cover: Braceros at Customs inspections, El Paso, Texas, 1955.
Source: United States Customs and Immigration Services History Office and Library.

Contributors

Christine L. Williams
Amber C. Kalb
Emily McDonald
Margaret Zeddies
Maria Valdovinos
Briana Pocratsky

Write for *The Sociologist*.

Contact the managing editor
bpocrats@masonlive.gmu.edu
for submission guidelines and
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The #MeToo Movement and Sexual Agency: Implications for Sociologists and Professional Associations

Christine L. Williams
President-Elect of the
American Sociological Association

The #MeToo Movement rapidly spread around the world in 2017, eleven years after Tarana Burke in Alabama founded it. #MeToo brought unprecedented attention to the problem of sexual harassment and renewed efforts to combat it. It also posed new challenges and opportunities for sociologists conducting research on the topic, as well as for those working within their professional associations to address the behavior.

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to share my reflections on this topic with the District of Columbia Sociology Society. I discussed how the #MeToo movement was bringing renewed interest in three questions: (1) Who bears the risks and responsibility for addressing harassment? (2) How can organizations best promote gender equity?, and (3) How can workers express sexual agency in the #MeToo era? The third question is the subject of this article.

Sexual agency refers to how people experience sexual desire. As embodied human beings, people express sexual agency in the workplace (and elsewhere) and not exclusively in ways that are hostile or harassing. Some forms of sexual expression are consensual and pleasurable. A number of critics of the #MeToo movement are concerned that all sexual behavior has become suspect in the wake of #MeToo. This concern raises the question of how to respect workers' sexual agency while also endeavoring to end sexual harassment.

The popular notion that there is a continuum of sexual violence illustrates how difficult it is to acknowledge sexual agency in the workplace. The sexual violence continuum is included in many sexual harassment training modules. Typically, the start of the continuum lists behaviors such as gender-specific jokes, sexual comments, and vulgar pictures—these are the least egregious forms of sexual violence. Seduction and inappropriate advances come next on the continuum, followed by threats and sexual bribery. Finally, at the far end of the continuum, physical assault and rape are examples of extreme forms of sexual violence.

Everyone can agree that the behavior on the far end of the continuum should never be tolerated. But should behaviors on the starting end of the continuum be outlawed? Some people may find pleasure in sexual comments and seduction, for example, and feel that these behaviors should not be equated with sexual harassment. This was the argument made last year in a letter signed by over 100 French women. They labelled the #MeToo movement "totalitarian," claiming it had chilling effects on all forms of sexual expression, including innocent flirting and sexual bantering. They denounced the movement for serving the enemies of sexual freedom, including religious extremists and political reactionaries.

Similarly, some feminist critics fear that the #MeToo movement is taking a step backward by embracing an older Victorian notion of women's sexual purity. They argue that nonconsenting behaviors should be forbidden, of course, but women should also be treated as sexual agents who can and do pursue erotic pleasure at work. Some who work in queer spaces, which may be experienced as liberating and not oppressive, share these feelings.

Implied in these measures is the notion that all sexual behaviors are harmful. These items are also heterosexist: men are predators; women are victims…

Implications for sociological researchers.

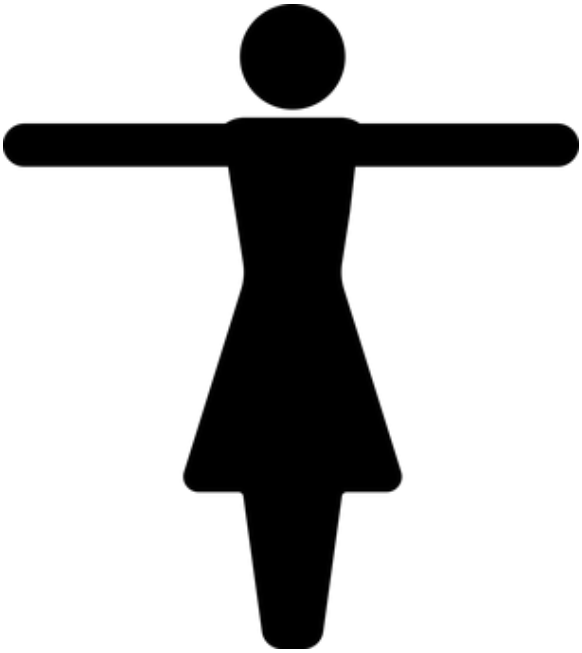
To incorporate sexual agency into our research, sociologists must pay more attention to how people actually decide what constitutes consensual and pleasurable sexual behavior on the one hand, versus harassment and assault on the other. Unfortunately, many studies of sexual harassment omit any consideration of sexual agency whatsoever. Many scholars rely instead on standardized questionnaires that pre-define what constitutes harassment, the most popular of which is the "Sexual Experiences Questionnaire" (SEQ), first developed by psychologist Louise Fitzgerald and her colleagues in 1988. Here are some sample items:

- Have you ever been in a situation where a supervisor or coworker habitually told suggestive stories or offensive jokes?
- Have you ever been in a situation where a supervisor or coworker attempted to establish a romantic sexual relationship with you despite your attempts to discourage him?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you were being subtly bribed with some sort of reward (e.g., preferential treatment) to engage in sexual behavior with a coworker?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you actually experienced negative consequences for refusing to engage in sexual activity with a coworker?
- Have you ever been in a situation where a coworker made unwanted attempts to stroke or fondle you (e.g., stroking your leg or neck, touching your breast, etc.). (Fitzgerald et al. 1995, p. 428)

This questionnaire is the current gold standard for conducting research on sexual harassment in the workplace.

In highly sexualized jobs in the service sector, for example, workers may tolerate sexual objectification…

The recent National Academies of Sciences report on sexual harassment explicitly endorses the SEQ, calling it "the most widely used and well-validated instrument available for measuring sexual harassment" (2018, 170).



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Looked at from the perspective of sexual agency, however, the survey appears one-sided. Implied in these measures is the notion that all sexual behaviors are harmful. These items are also heterosexist: men are predators; women are victims (meanwhile Tarana Burke insists that the #MeToo movement is for all survivors). Most importantly, this research lets the expert decide what is and is not sexual harassment. In other words, these measures deny sexual agency to respondents.

What happens when you let workers decide what harassment is? Research shows that workers draw boundary lines at work between three different kinds of behavior: (1) pleasurable and welcomed sexual behaviors, (2) sexual behaviors they are willing to tolerate, and (3) sexually oppressive and harassing behaviors. These subjective definitions do not necessarily map onto the legal definitions of sexual harassment or the items on the SEQ. Instead, workplace context matters. In highly sexualized jobs in the service sector, for example, workers

may tolerate sexual objectification because they understand it as part of their job description, while in other jobs, the same behavior may be experienced as demeaning and harassing.

Future scholarship should document how workers draw boundary lines in the #MeToo era, with an eye to understanding how these definitions privilege some groups while targeting others for punishment.

In studies conducted in the U.S. before the #MeToo movement, my coauthors Patti Giuffre, Kirsten Dellinger, and I found that workers were willing to label behaviors as sexual harassment only under one of these four conditions:

1. If it is perpetrated by an individual boss against an individual employee.
2. If it is perpetrated by an individual of a different race, social class, or sexual orientation.
3. If it violates the norms of the work group.
4. If it has a severe impact on the victim.

Experiencing one of these conditions does not mean that a worker will make a formal complaint of harassment. Rather, under these four conditions workers expressed a willingness to define unwanted sexual behaviors as harassment.

Workers tolerated—and in some cases even enjoyed—similar behaviors under different conditions (e.g., when perpetrated by a peer of the same race, class, and sexual orientation—thus potentially reinforcing social inequality). Future scholarship should document how workers draw boundary lines in the #MeToo era, with an eye to understanding how these definitions privilege some groups while targeting others for punishment.

Implications for professional societies

The National Academies of Sciences report assigns professional societies a central role in the fight against sexual harassment in the academy. However, incorporating the notion of sexual agency in sexual harassment policy is a challenge for professional societies. How might they develop a policy that lets members define for themselves what constitutes acceptable, tolerable, and harassing behavior?

Even sociologists will not agree on these definitions. For instance, some members encourage and celebrate a broadening of acceptable sexual expression at our conferences to make the ASA more open and inclusive, while these behaviors may be offensive to other members. So who gets to draw the boundary lines? In the work world, employers typically decide. They institute policies that define acceptable and unacceptable sexual expression, by, for example:

- Controlling and/or mandating specified forms of sexual expression at work (e.g., dress codes, aesthetic requirements)
- Outlawing sexual expression (e.g., anti-fraternization policies)
- Imposing sex segregation at work (e.g., relegating men and women to different jobs and locations within a company).

All of these are flawed responses that do not address or even acknowledge sexual agency. They remind me of parents' efforts to control their teenagers' sexuality. Instead of this top-down approach, professional societies that are democratically structured and member-focused are committed to undertaking a more collaborative process. This entails promoting a sociological understanding about sexual harassment and encouraging dialog about the issues—efforts that ASA is currently undertaking. Moving forward, it will be important to engage the membership at all levels—including in sections and on committees. The first principle of #MeToo should guide this effort: building a community of support for survivors of sexual abuse.

The Promise of #MeToo

The #MeToo movement brought renewed attention to the problem of sexual harassment. As an online platform, it acts as a megaphone, uniting the voices of vast numbers

of individual workers who have experienced abusive treatment at work. In a very short time, it has become a powerful force in society, inspiring fresh dialog about an incessant social problem. This is a world-changing moment that no one could have predicted. As Catharine MacKinnon remarked recently, "Women have been saying these things forever. It is the response to them that has changed."

We are now having a public conversation about survivors of sexual assault, finding new ways to support their efforts to heal, and building new community awareness and commitment to fighting sexual harassment. #MeToo is an opportunity for sociologists to enhance our understanding of sexual harassment and for professional associations to promote new programs and policies to address it. In this article, I have argued for an approach that respects workers' sexual agency. This will not be an easy task, but it is a goal worth pursuing.

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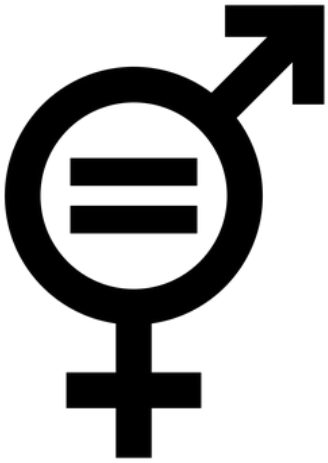

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Ask the Sociologist

Feminist Sociological Theory and Conflict Theory

Amber C. Kalb

Dear Sociologist,
Feminist sociological theory is said to be a sub-area of conflict theory and not a theory in its own right; would this be an accurate statement?*
Sincerely,
Conflicted over Conflict Theory

Dear Conflicted over Conflict Theory,
Most sociologists will agree that feminist sociological theory is a theory in its own right, but this agreement largely depends on how one is defining 'theory' in relation to a host of other relevant terms, such as a school of thought, paradigm and/or critical perspective. An adequate answer to your question requires delving into these definitional debates where sociologists, and scholars in general, attempt to create conceptually distinct categories demarcating, for example, what counts as theory versus critical point of view (but not necessarily a full-fledged theory per se).

The answer to your question is in three parts: What is theory? What is the type of relationship between conflict theory and sociology? And, what is feminist sociological theory and where is it situated in relation to conflict theory?

There is a point of view that we can negotiate or redraw categorical boundaries based on new empirical evidence, normative concerns and/or analytical usefulness. The terms we use in our debates such as 'theory,' 'paradigm,' or 'critical perspective' are not exclusive categories. For example, there are theoretical traditions, theories and critical perspectives that fit neither of these categories perfectly but, rather, seem to share characteristics from more than one concept. This latter observation is likely at the heart of your question. This essay is a brief sketch of this contested terrain in response to the question.

Theory & Conflict Theory

In general, a theory of *anythingeverything* is a testable explanation of how the world operates. In a very basic sense, you use theory everyday as you navigate the nuances of social interaction in our natural world.

We rely on s*ocial* theory to help us understand "… the social organization of society, the behavior of people and groups, (social theory) explains why structures take the forms they do at various historical times as well as in local situations, and how and what kinds of changes occur" (Collins 1990: 70).

…the term 'conflict *theory*' houses a variety of approaches that share a set of general propositions about analyzing the social world.

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Sociology textbooks tend to divvy up approaches to sociological analysis along the lines of structural functionalism, conflict theory and symbolic interactionism, and the term 'conflict *theory'* houses a variety of approaches that share a set of general propositions in analyzing the social world. These shared philosophical and theoretical orientations towards the social world is what we might call a 'paradigm' or school of thought. Specifically, paradigms are "a set of assumptions, theories and perspectives that make up a way of understanding the social world" (Ferris & Stein 2016:18). Conflict theory, can be understood as "a general approach to the entire field of sociology that focuses research on stratification and hierarchic organization as key to explaining all sociological phenomena…" (Collins 1990:72).

…is it liberating to shield oneself from objectifying gazes through certain forms of dress, or use one's body and sexuality unabashedly as a source of empowerment…?

Feminist Theory & Feminist Sociological Theory

So, where does feminist sociological theory fit into all this? We have to unpack the term 'feminist-sociological-theory.' Are we talking about feminist theory *in* sociology or feminist correctives *to* classic and contemporary sociological theory? Would one be more appropriately considered 'theory' as opposed to the other? And, if so, can we locate a distinct line that separates these categories?

The term 'feminist theory' is a broad term used to refer to a variety of writing and thinking across the disciplines that, while united in their opposition to women's oppression, differ not only in their views of how to combat that oppression, but even in their conception of what constitutes oppression in contemporary society and who belongs (or doesn't belong) under the category of 'women' (McClure 1992). For example, is it liberating to shield oneself from objectifying gazes through certain forms of dress, or use one's body and sexuality unabashedly as a source of empowerment in a society that historically oppressed and controlled the feminine form?

Does this category of 'women' extend only to those *assigned as* females at birth? Or, does it extend to those who identify as women later in life? Does one need the formative experiences of growing up 'female' to understand what it means to be a "woman" within an oppressive patriarchal system? These debates, as well as approaches to women's liberation, have produced many orientations and sub-categories of feminist thought (socialist feminists, radical feminists, black feminists, Marxist feminists, Third world feminists, liberal feminists among others).

If we accept opposition to women's oppression as a unifying theme and foundational to all feminist theories, sociological and otherwise, we might conclude that feminist sociological theory does in fact belong under the genre of conflict theory since stratification and hierarchical organization seems inherent to its very *raison d'être*. But, this is beside the point. This classification still fails to settle what exactly is being signaled when sociologists add the qualifier 'feminist' to sociological theory?

Depending on the critique leveraged, several approaches have been developed by feminists to right the wrongs of sociology's misogynist past.

Feminist Sociological Theory Or Not?

Feminist scholars within and outside of the discipline have critiqued classic and contemporary sociological theory for its gender-

blind spots, androcentric biases and oppressive prescriptions. As a result, feminists have prescribed a host of corrective actions for these theoretical deficits. Depending on the critique leveraged, several approaches have been developed by feminists to right the wrongs of sociology's misogynist past.

On the one hand, many feminist scholars in sociology see the project of feminist sociological theory as "… a systematic and critical reevaluation of sociology's core assumptions in light of the discoveries being made within another community of discourse—the community of those creating Feminist theory" (Lengermann 1990). For example, many classic sociological theories rest on implicit assumptions of human nature to provide an interpretation of observations of the social world and make predictions or prescriptions based on those assumptions.

If individuals are understood as selfish, autonomous actors looking to maximize individual gain while minimizing costs as opposed to highly empathetic and interdependent social creatures, these assumptions are going to produce very different theories (or models) of the social world (England 1989).

…feminist sociological theory ranges from the *old* 'add-women-and-stir' approach where little changes except women's numerical inclusion...to questioning and radically transforming social theory's base assumptions…

At the same time, feminist thought is far from homogenous and involves several approaches to sociological theory that might be perceived as falling short of theory-creation. For example, many feminist empiricists do not take issue with social theory's base assumptions and methodological practices but, rather, see women's exclusion from empirical observation as bad practice in research.

Finally, feminist sociological theory ranges from the *old* 'add-women-and-stir' approach where little changes except women's numerical inclusion as an essential part of society and social phenomena to questioning and radically transforming social theory's base assumptions and methodological practices.

Both approaches to sociological theory would likely be considered 'feminist sociological theory,' but they differ in the degree of autonomy in relation to traditional sociological theory (consider the gaze of feminist empiricists versus standpoint feminists versus postmodernist feminists.)

*Question was edited for clarity.

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Evicted at the National Building Museum

Emily McDonald

In April 2019, I saw the Evicted exhibit at the National Building Museum. I came to the exhibit having read the book by Matthew Desmond, which has become one of the most influential books on poverty and homelessness in the last few years. I have also read the conversations by housing activists, scholars, and policymakers both praising and critiquing Desmond's work and his Lab.

As I reflected on the ways data was turned into a comprehensive story of our national eviction problem, what stood out to me most were qualitative stories used to illuminate the personal experience of losing your home.

The first section of the exhibit is set up like a house, with symbolic data visualizations covering the sides. A set of keys to break down women evicted by race, with four of 60 white women, five of 60 Hispanic women, and 12 of 60 Black women experiencing eviction. And, as you walk inside the home, there's a video playing on loop of one woman's story that truly pulls you in. The curator's choice in using stories of employed persons became a call to introspection about our own vulnerabilities.

Two years ago (*The Sociologist* January 2017), I spoke with Liane Scott, Grassroots DC founder and local activist, about public housing in the District. When I asked her how she came to fight for housing rights, she revealed that she does not necessarily see herself as any more removed from the fight for housing than those who cannot currently afford the private market. She stated, "I related more than I'd like to the struggle for housing and the fear of losing it."

The exhibition features audio from Unfurl Productions, who recruited persons battling eviction cases in Camden, New Jersey. The woman that stood out most to me was a single mom and social worker. She faced eviction, despite her full-time government employment status and education. She was

The exhibition harnesses the imagination by inviting the public to empathize with the housing precarity in our prosperous country.

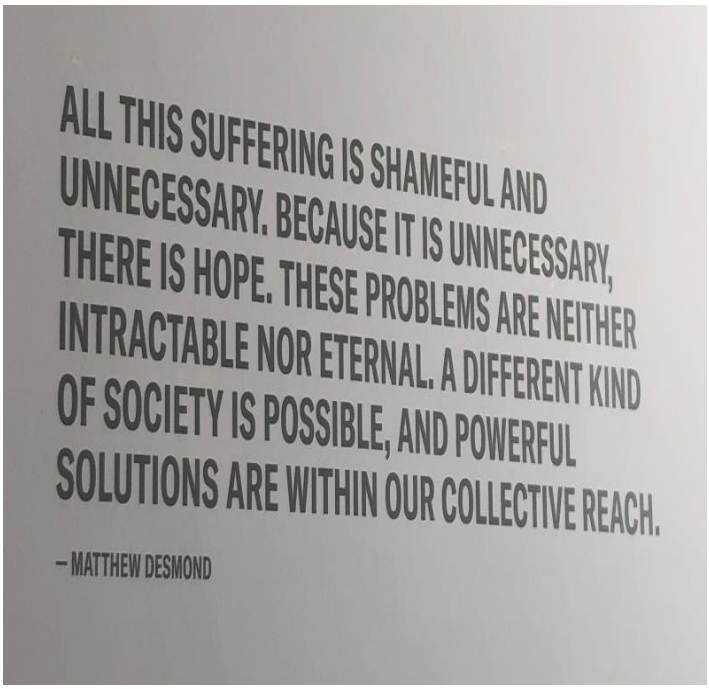

Photo by Emily McDonald

experiencing a not-so-unfamiliar cut in her hours at work and had no means to garner extra income. The social worker who helped her fellow community members find the social safety net in difficult times now needed help.

The exhibition harnesses the imagination by inviting the public to empathize with the housing precarity in our prosperous country.

Framing Slavery at Mount Vernon

Margaret Zeddies

Tucked away from D.C.'s busy beltway lies Mount Vernon, the former estate of the first President of the United States. The 500-acre property was inherited by George from his father in 1761 and was purchased by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association in 1858 to save the estate from ruin. Today, Mount Vernon is operated by the Association as an historic site that includes museums, Washington's presidential library, and vintage farmsteads. But, the museum at Mount Vernon lightly touches upon the legacy of slavery in Washington's personal and professional life, and the topic is obscured in ways that sit uneasily.

Museums and historical sites like Mount Vernon are purveyors of information that frame how we view our social world. The ways in which slavery is presented at Mount Vernon matter ideologically in terms of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva describes as "expressions at the symbolic level of the fact of dominance" (2014:74). If we consider this definition of ideology, then we can consider how slavery is expressed symbolically at Mount Vernon. In a dominant symbolic expression, history is framed in "set paths for interpreting information" (Bonilla-Silva 2014:74). It is therefore important that we "undertake an exacting political and ethical critique of…ideologies of difference" (Mbembe 2017:177) as we follow tours and signposts.

At Mount Vernon, it would be easy to imagine a visitor who only thinks of slavery briefly, who "hears so little that there almost seems to be a conspiracy of silence; the morning papers seldom mention it, and then usually in a far-fetched academic way, and indeed almost everyone seems to forget and ignore the darker half of the land, until the astonished visitor is inclined to ask if after all there *is* any problem here" (DuBois1994:110). Upon entering the estate, visitors are ushered into a room where an introductory film called *We Fight to be Free* is screened. The film is an unapologetic tribute to Washington, who is portrayed as a morally impeccable revolutionary hero (Van Oostrum 2006).

The role of slave labor in contributing to Washington's vast wealth—one of the richest presidents in United States history—goes mostly unmentioned. Our tour guide described the present-day estate as a "working plantation" with no sense of irony as to what a working plantation would entail if it were to include period-relevant slaves.

…the absence of slavery becomes louder as we read maps that breezily describe the location of slaves' quarters alongside prized fruit gardens.

Progressing further along the tour, the absence of slavery becomes louder as we read maps that breezily describe the location of slaves' quarters alongside prized fruit gardens. We climbed staircases to peer at Martha Washington's closets and hear about her shopping habits.

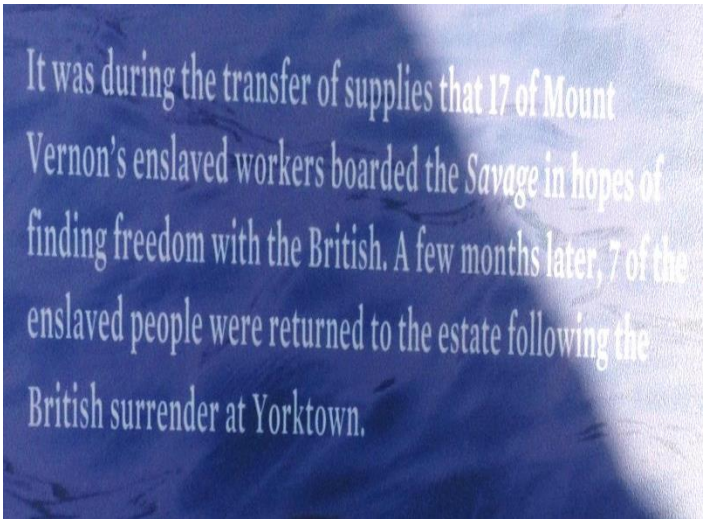

Photo by Margaret Zeddies

The pockets of information where slavery is discussed are fragmented: ensconced in a museum deep in the main building, on a placard outside the boating dock, and in an isolated reconstruction of a slave's cabin. The museum exhibit *Lives Bound Together: Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon* (MacLeod 2016) provided personal details of slaves who were kept at Mount Vernon, but kept them at a distance from Washington's narrative. Mount Vernon's official website does contain a special section on slavery with over two dozen entries on subjects like *Slavery at Mount Vernon*, and *Martha Washington as a Slaveowner* (Mount Vernon 2019b). The archival nature of a website cannot be expected to be reproduced in an hour-long tour.

…a political economy approach that considered the role of slave labor in Washington's wealth, for example, might provide an ontology that acknowledges both the labor of slave bodies and their exploitation.

Perhaps most interestingly, the term "enslaved peoples" (used throughout the literature, displays, and guided tours at Mount Vernon) was deliberately chosen over the word "slaves." A display panel in the *Lives Bound Together* exhibit addressed the word choice. The language, it states, was used intentionally so as to invoke the "humanity" of the slaves (MacLeod 2016). However, as Mbembe has problematized, the "idea of a common human condition is the object of many pious declarations. But it is far from being put into practice" (2017:161). Instead, a political economy approach that considered the role of slave labor in Washington's wealth, for example, might provide an ontology that acknowledges both the labor of slave bodies and their exploitation. For, "the term 'Black' was the product of a social and technological machine tightly linked to the emergence and globalization of capitalism" (Mbembe 2017:6). This might even provide more support for the argument for reparations.

The guided tour ended in Mount Vernon's kitchen where slaves labored in the pre-dawn to keep the residents fed. During my visit, one tourist marveled at the cook's ability to rise so early. The tour guide missed an opportunity to inform guests why a slave (such as Washington's personal favorite chef, Hercules, who later attempted escape) would be obliged to rise early. Instead, the tour ended, and the questioning tourist who exited through the kitchen's back door had the same fate as DuBois' "casual observer visiting the South" who "notes the growing frequency of dark faces as he rides along, – but otherwise the days slip lazily on, the sun shines, and this little world seems as happy and contented as other worlds he has visited." (1994: 110).

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The Ultimate Project: Erik Olin Wright and Real Utopias

Maria Valdovinos

In January 2019, Dr. Erik Olin Wright, Vilas Distinguished Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison lost his battle with leukemia. A Marxist sociologist and one of the most influential theorists in the discipline, Dr. Wright's work focused largely on our social and economic condition. His work engaged with real world challenges such as poverty. Professor Wright also problematized theories of class structure and posited alternatives to institutions like capitalism.

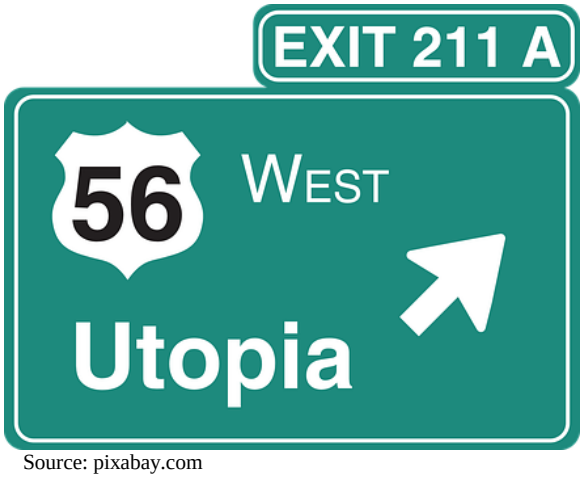
In *Envisioning Real Utopias*, he asked the provocative question: what would a world guided by alternatives to our existing social institutions look like? In his own words, the project sought "*to join together discussions that take seriously the ideals of a just and humane world and ask what kinds of real institutions could embody these ideals and how can we transform the world in which we live to better approximate these ideals?"*

Although utopias are imagined spaces of perfection, rarely did Dr. Wright's work stay in the realm of utopia. One of the things that made his work so consequential was that he successfully showed us how ideas that might seem impossible in our society could in fact be quite pragmatic. His project was theoretically provocative and sophisticated, as well as empirical. To prove the pragmatic potential of real utopias Dr. Wright walked us through examples from all over the world such as participatory budgets in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the Citizen Assembly for Electoral Reform in British Columbia, Wikipedia, and the idea of unconditional basic income.

Of these examples, most of us are probably best familiar with Wikipedia and the peer-to-peer, collaborative platform it represents. Dr. Wright, however, takes it a step further, making the case for how this platform represents a "new form of non-capitalist, non-market production in the digital age" (Wright 2011:40). In other words, the platform represents a real utopia—an empirical alternative that is "organized around horizontal reciprocities rather than hierarchical control" (Wright 2011:40). It is hard to imagine a platform where anyone can feel empowered to participate and contribute while still managing a relatively high level of procedural efficiency, information accuracy, and organization.

Dr. Wright spoke about real utopias and their centrality in a much larger intellectual project, that of emancipatory social science.

Yet, this is exactly what we have in this new digital encyclopedic form. Another example of a real utopia which we might be less familiar with is the practice of participatory budgets that take place in Porto Alegre, Brazil. It is a great example of the process in a city of approximately 1.7 million people where anyone can expect to vote and contribute to the city's budget via neighborhood assemblies.



Source: pixabay.com

A couple of years ago, Dr. Wright visited George Mason University and I had the opportunity to hear him speak at a two-day workshop entitled "Amplifying the Concept of 'Well-Being': Public and Global Dimensions." Dr. Wright spoke about real utopias and their centrality in a much larger intellectual project, that of emancipatory social science. I remember being both confused and intrigued by the idea. It was only my second year in my graduate program and I was still trying to find my footing. A key strength of Dr. Wright's work, however, is that no matter your discipline, research focus, or social problem of interest, you could always find applicability in his work.

The idea of emancipatory social science as an intellectual pursuit and imperative has followed me over the years. In *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Dr. Wright argues that scientific knowledge necessary for overcoming human oppression "faces three basic tasks: 1) elaborating a systematic diagnosis and critique of the world as it exists; 2) envisioning viable alternatives, and 3) understanding the obstacles, possibilities, and dilemmas of transformation" (Wright, 2010:10). This is a key framework that guides my work focused on the future of criminal justice reform.

…in the real utopias that Dr. Wright introduced us to in his decades long project, we see how the seemingly impossible can in many ways be possible as well as pragmatic.

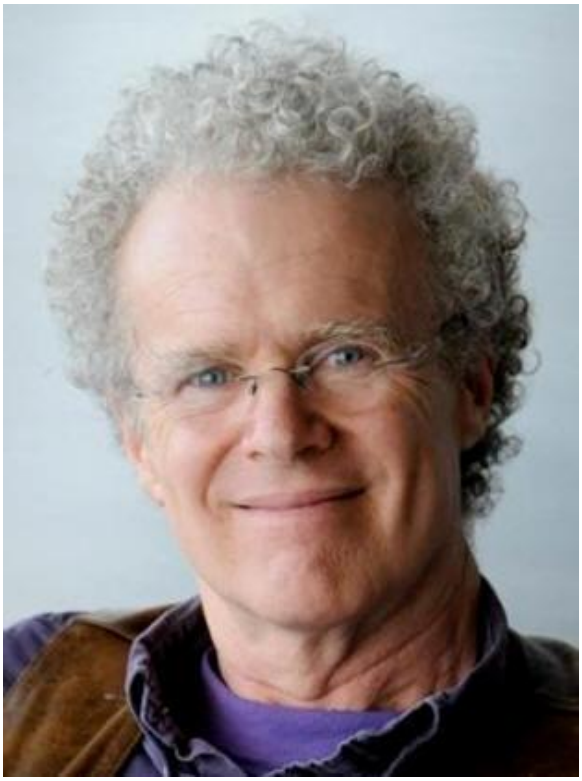
In my work I often struggle with the idea of whether the American criminal justice system could in fact be a sort of real utopia someday. By this, I mean could we actually have a system of justice where justice is administered in a fair and equitable manner? The desire for a "just system of justice" rings loud but so does the doubt that this could ever be. Yet, in the real utopias that Dr. Wright introduced us to in his decades long project, we see how the seemingly impossible can in many ways be possible as well as pragmatic. If we could envision a real utopia of criminal justice, what might such a system look like? How would it need to transform? How would it operate? I don't have answers to these questions. The contributions of Dr. Wright are without a doubt significant, and his passing is a great loss for the discipline. I am convinced that his project will continue to inspire the work of generations of social scientists in many ways. It certainly has inspired me.

References and Notes

Wright, Erik O. (2010). *Envisioning Real Utopias.* New York, NY: Verso.

Wright, Erik O. (2011). "Real Utopias." *Contexts, 10*(2):36-42.

1. https://www.pbs.org/video/university-place-envisioning-real-utopias-ep-137/



Erik Olin Wright. Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Sociology

Ask the Sociologist

Unsure about Subcultures

Briana Pocratsky

Dear Sociologist,
Are ethnic groups considered to be subcultures?*
Sincerely,
Unsure about subcultures

Definitions
Ethnic groups are generally distinct groups that "are fundamental units of social organization" that include "members who define themselves, or are defined, by a sense of common historical origins that may also include religious beliefs, a similar language, or a shared culture" (Stone and Piya 2007).

Subcultures play an important role in articulating an identity, producing a sense of belonging, and influencing members to consider their relationship to mainstream society; however, subcultures are different from largely recognized identity categories such as ethnicity. While an ethnic group may be a minority group, this does not mean that they are a "subculture" as the term has been understood.

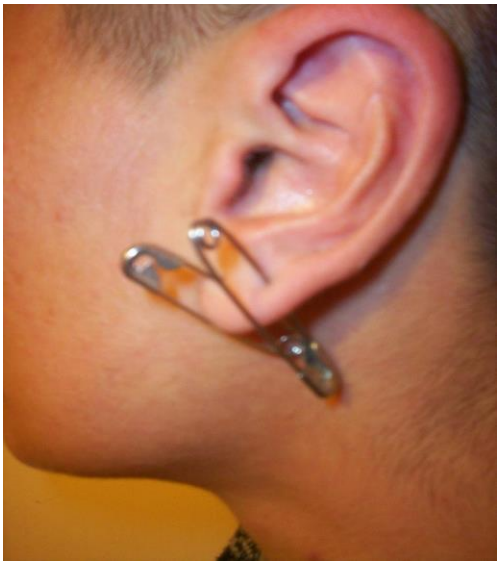
Haenfler (2014) offers the following working definition of subculture: *"A relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices, and objects, and a sense of marginalization from or resistance to a perceived 'conventional' society."* In addition to these characteristics, subcultures may also share a specialized type of vocabulary, style and music, subcultural history or lore. By this definition, social groupings, social movements, countercultures, new religious movements, gangs, and fandoms, may have subcultural elements.

A malleable term

The malleability regarding how we think about the definition of subculture leaves a lot of gray space. So much so, post-subcultural studies have questioned if "subculture" is even a helpful analytical category. Yet, other scholars still very much conceptualize subcultures as a valuable way of understanding shared creative and meaningful responses to a particular social circumstance and have worked to develop clearer and more complex understandings of "subculture" that include a more nuanced engagement with axes of identity and a perspective that adapts to changing social, media, and political landscapes (for examples see Haenfler 2014 and Jensen 2018).

… the axes of identity and subcultures are tied to inequality and shape the lived experiences of people.

Early studies of subcultures focused on youth, crime, deviance and immigration; and studies of subcultures in urban areas (especially) have unveiled sites and profiles of ethnic diversity, class struggle, social disorganization and social contradictions.



Source: Wikimedia Commons. This image shows the subversive use of products. A safety pin is used as an earring by members of some punk subcultures.

Later studies understood youth subcultures as creative and meaningful sites of symbolic resistance to social order, often conveyed through activities, stylistic practices, and language. Subcultures are also theorized as an *answer to a shared situation* (Jensen 2018: 408). Subcultural studies tell us something about social, cultural, and political power relations, what is constructed as "deviant" in society, and how and why people identify with certain groups in various contexts.

Finally, while socially constructed categories for understanding ourselves and our world (such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation,) are largely thought of as something different from the conception of subculture, the axes of identity and subculture are tied to inequality and shape the lived experiences of people. These categories frame how individuals think about themselves in relationship to society.

Additional Resources

Subculture: The Meaning of Style (1979): Dick Hebdige's study of British youth subcultures after WWII ▪ *Feminism and Youth Culture* (1991): A book by Angela McRobbie that focuses on girl subcultures ▪ *Subcultures: The Basics* (2014): A book by Ross Haenfler that maps the history of subcultural studies, develops a working definition of subculture, and engages with the concept's complexity ▪ "What is Ethnicity?" (2019): A YouTube video by *Origin of Everything*'s Danielle Bainbridge (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1AY95Z64gg)

*Question was edited for brevity and clarity.

References

Haenfler, Ross. 2014. "What is a Subculture?" in *Subcultures: The Basics.* London: Routledge.

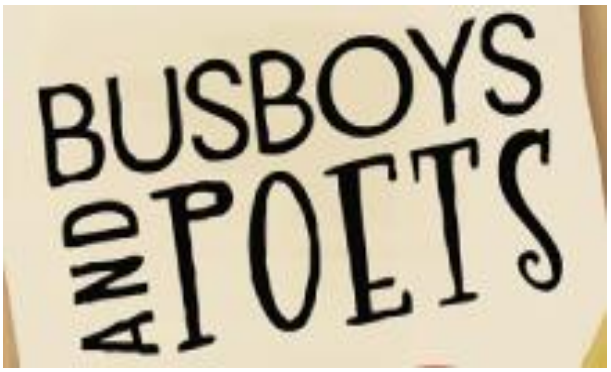
Jensen, Sune Qvotrup. 2018. "Towards a Neo-Birminghamian Conception of Subculture? History, Challenges, and Future Potentials." Journal of Youth Studies 21(4):405-421.

McRobbie, Angela. 1991. "The Culture of Working Class Girls." Pp. 35-60 in *Feminism and Youth Culture: From "Jackie" to 'Just Seventeen."* Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman.

Stone, John and Bhumika Piya. 2007. "Ethnic Groups." The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology.

Annual Banquet
&
Award Ceremony

Thursday, May 23, 2019



2021 14th Street, NW,
Washington, D.C. 20009

Annual Banquet

Panel discussion
Sociology and the #MeToo Movement

Moderator

Earl Smith
Emeritus Professor
of American Ethnic Studies and Sociology at Wake Forest University;
currently teaching classes in Sociology, African and African American Studies, and Women and Gender Studies at
George Mason University

Panelists

Mary Silva
Leader
Court Watch Safe Visitation Team
Court Watch Montgomery

Ivy Ken
Associate Professor of Sociology
The George Washington University

Angela Hattery
Sociologist and Director
Women & Gender Studies Program
George Mason University

Thursday, May 23, 2019

2019 Awardees

The Morris Rosenberg Award for Outstanding Sociological Achievement

Dr. Cynthia Miller-Idriss
Professor of Education and Sociology
American University

Stuart A. Rice Merit Award for Career Achievement

Dr. Walda Katz-Fishman
Professor of Sociology
Howard University

2019 Awardees

Irene B. Taeuber Graduate Student Paper Awards

PhD Paper
Yukiko Furuya
George Mason University

MA Paper
Eric Stone
University of Maryland, College Park

Anna Julia Cooper Award for Public Sociology

Court Watch Montgomery