SPECIAL FEATURE

VARIETIES OF RESPONSES TO STIGMATIZATION

Macro, Meso, and Micro Dimensions

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INTRODUCTION[1]

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It is particularly fitting that *Du Bois Review* would publish a special feature titled "Varieties of Responses to Stigmatization: Macro, Meso, and Micro Dimensions." In many ways, we can consider the management of stigma to be a quintessentially Du Bois topic. In his classical writings on double consciousness, this pioneering social theorist (2007) captured the complex psychological experience of managing a life where one feels divided within oneself. He focused specifically on African American identity defined by the tension of being two at once (American and Black): "The Negro ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. 3).

Erving Goffman's (1963) seminal writings have also left significant marks on this topic. They have stimulated a deluge of writing on stigmatization and destigmatization processes across the social sciences. Indeed, social psychologists have long been concerned with stigma, and with its perception and management, mostly at the intra-individual and interpersonal level (e.g., Crocker et al., 1998). Cultural anthropologists have also studied these topics, focusing in particular on morality and stigma and on cross-national variations in the meaning attached to mental illness (Kleinman and Hall-Clifford, 2009; Yang et al., 2007). Epidemiologists have studied the impact of stigmatization, or perception of discrimination, on racial disparities in health (Williams et al., 2003). American and European political sociologists, legal experts, and students of social movements have turned their attention to how stigmatized groups and victims have mobilized to improve their access to resources, promote a transformation of their legal status, or challenge stereotypes they were victims of (Barbot and Dodier, 2011; Saguy and Ward, 2011). Sociological research concerned with stigma is produced by experts in deviance, race and ethnicity, sexuality, mental health, religion and culture, among others (for instance, Becker 1963; Becker et al.,

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2006; Schnittker and McLeod, 2005).The topic has also attracted researchers studying the transformation of group boundaries (Bail 2008; Wimmer 2008). At the time when social scientists are becoming more interested in the study of social mechanisms, stigmatization can be regarded as a fundamental social process, along with valuation, valorization, differentiation, hierarchalization, commensuration, standardization, etc. (Espeland and Stevens, 1998; Timmermans and Epstein, 2010). Gaining a better understanding of this topic is essential for improving our understanding of basic social dynamics, as well as for achieving greater social justice and social inclusion (Ben-Habib 1996; Fraser 2003).

Despite this multifarious convergence in interest, little has been done to bring these various disciplinary strands of research in dialogue with one another and to integrate them in a systematic way, with an eye for cumulative theory building. It would be useful to compare whether and how stigma based on lifestyle, ascribed characteristics, morality, and health, operate the same way and generate the same kinds of responses in similar and different contexts, and whether such stigmas can be managed with a comparable range of strategies. It would also be useful to know whether and how various types of stigmas operate differently in various kinds of institutional settings and contexts (school, family, prisons, neighborhoods, etc.), and how they are enabled and constrained by available cultural repertoires (pertaining, for instance, to human nature, conflict, diversity, biological determinism, neoliberalism, etc.). More generally, much work remains to be done to capture the impact of institutions and cultural frameworks on the dynamics of stigmatization and destigmatization, and how these are generated through an interaction between micro interactions, meso institutional and cultural levels, and macro dynamics.

This special feature contributes to such a research program by building on a 2012 issue of the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, "Responses to Stigmatization in Comparative Perspectives: Brazil, Canada, Israel, France, South Africa, Sweden, and the United States," (Lamont and Mizrachi, 2012) which has taken up the agenda described above. This issue provided a systematic comparison of responses to stigmatization across a range of national settings. It considered how predominant responses are enabled by dominant national myths and ideologies that define rules of social and cultural membership. This is the case for confronting in the United States (Fleming et al., 2012), promoting racial mixture in Brazil (Silva and Reis, 2012), and claiming membership in Israel (what Mizrachi and Herzog (2012) call participatory destigmatization). This special issue also considered how ordinary citizens go about responding to stigma, by changing their names (studied by Bursell (2012) in the case of Muslims in Sweden), rigidifying group boundaries (as explored by Denis (2012) concerning first nations in Ontario), or competing about the meaning of Blackness (about Afro-Caribbeans in France by Fleming (2012)). The goal was to demonstrate through systematic qualitative analysis how individuals interpret stigmatization and conceptualize strategies for dealing with social and cultural exclusion. The papers considered how responses are affected by the boundedness of group identity, as well as by the historical trajectory of race relations across countries (Silva (2012) on the Brazil and South African cases). It also explores how stigma based on ethnicity (Mizrahis in Israel), religion (Arabs in Israel) and phenotype (Ethiopian Jews in Israel) operate similarly. This opens the way to further comparative exploration of responses to stigma, how they are shaped by the rigidity and configuration of national group boundaries in a particular context (Lamont and Bail, 2005).

With this special feature, we aim to continue to feed such a broader theoretical agenda, by considering stigma and responses to stigma as they manifest themselves in other contexts of interaction. We also draw on various disciplinary tools and models

of analysis made available to us by intellectual geography, history, geography, psychology, and sociology. Finally, we also consider stigmatization and destigmatization processes across various national contexts, focusing on Canada, France, Israel, and the United States (Lamont and Thévenot, 2000).

This special feature also examines the role of institutions at the micro and macro level in enabling and constraining how members of minority groups both conceptualize and respond to stigmatization. By uncovering the cultural tools people use to respond to stigma in different contexts and aspects of social life (collective memory, group identification, problem framing, institutional settings, and personal accounts of exclusion), the papers assembled here illustrate an approach to the study of inequality and group relations that takes meaning-making seriously. Taken together, this special feature and the *Ethnic and Racial Studies* issue demonstrate the critical importance of a cross-national, qualitative analysis of responses to stigmatization for understanding the dynamics of boundary work and providing insight into the capacity of individuals and societies for challenging boundaries, claiming recognition and inclusion, transforming social hierarchies, and reducing inter-group conflict. The time has come for more systematic empirical research oriented toward uncovering patterns of meaning and responses across population, going beyond the pioneering work that brought this topic to the table (Essed 1991; Feagin 1991; Link and Phelan, 2001). As such, this featured section has the potential to contribute to a broader literature on anti-racism (Lentin 2004; Modood 1997), antiracist and recognition social movements (Hobson 2003; McAdam 1982) and categorization processes and identity change (Brubaker 2009; Todd 2005).

Moving from the macro to the micro, this section opens with a paper by intellectual historian Gérard Bouchard, which provides a historical analysis of the destigmatization strategies employed by French Canadian activists contributing to an influential intellectual publication in Québec during the 1960s. Specifically, these activists believed that for Québec to achieve full cultural emancipation, this society would require a new national language. This led the group to consider at length the strengths and weaknesses of *joual* (Québec French) in the page of the journal *Parti Pris*. The overall objective of the group was to free Québec from both English and French colonialisms. As *joual* was framed as symbolizing English domination, the group worked toward destigmatizing it and claiming it as Québec's authentic national language. This strategy came with a heavy price since it meant distancing Québec from the prestigious French language—a move that *Parti Pris* intellectuals were reluctant to make for fear of perpetuating French domination. Bouchard argues that those leftist activists failed to develop the collective myths that would have helped them transcend contradictions raised by *joual*, therefore jeopardizing the eventual success of their cultural enterprise of destigmatization. This paper highlights the role of cultural repertoires in the success of destigmatization strategies. As such, it is concerned with macro cultural structures produced in a specific institutional (meso) context—an influential intellectual journal centrally involved with the transformation of collective identity.

Turning to spatial analysis James Dunn, a geographer, explores the creation of mixed income public housing developments as urban destigmatization strategies. While research on destigmatization focuses heavily on what Dunn terms "personal" destigmatization strategies (the ways in which individuals respond to everyday experiences with discrimination), less is known about what he terms "place" destigmatization strategies. His approach considers the importance of institutions in the study of destigmatization. Dunn focuses specifically on the case of Regent Park, a stigmatized public housing development in the process of being transformed into mixed

income housing in Toronto, Canada. He argues that by bringing together individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds, creating mixed spaces within the units (shared parks, gardens, etc.), and housing people of different social groups in buildings that share the same architectural features and building materials, this urban development may provide the opportunity for creating public housing that is less stigmatized. Dunn also suggests that future research should focus more closely on mixed income housing and place destigmatization strategies. This paper illuminates how policies and institutions (in this case, municipal agencies) can contribute to destigmatization processes.

Addressing another meso-level phenomenon, group life, Judith Taylor, Ron Levi, and Ronit Dinovitzer explore collective identity and destigmatization among Jewish Canadians who have traveled with the Taglit-birthright group, a tourism organization that facilitates tourism to Israel for Jews from different countries. Drawing upon data from focus groups, they argue that participants engage in "identity labor" during their travel, which involves focusing on their identity as Jews and their identity in the larger diaspora. They find that Canadian Jews who have participated in the Taglit-birthright tourism group develop a stronger sense of collective identity by grappling with competing emotions that arise over the course of their guided tour. The ambiguities that result from participants' divergent emotional experiences (i.e., feelings of excitement and amusement during periods of "free time" vs. feelings of guilt and remorse in the presence of Holocaust memorials) lead them to develop a sense of personal responsibility for contributing to both Jewish identity and the Israeli homeland. Taylor, Levi, and Dinovitzer provide important insight into the role of emotions in shaping collective identity among members of stigmatized groups.

For her part, Jovonne Bickerstaff examines antiracist strategies at the micro level, focusing on French Blacks to show how minorities of immigrant descent manage definitions of group membership under French republicanism. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with twenty first-generation French subjects of sub-Saharan African descent, this exploratory paper focuses on the significant impact of context on the range of anti-racist responses that individuals employ. It analyzes reports of personal and impersonal experiences with stigmatization and discrimination in multiple contexts including seeking service in public places, searching for jobs, interacting with co-workers, and at school. Bickerstaff finds that respondents are more likely to report using conflict-deflating strategies in impersonal experiences with racism, primarily because they believe they have limited control in such situations. In managing personal experiences with racism, by contrast, they believe they have more control and so employ a more diverse set of strategies, including confrontation. This study also considers how race, immigration, and national identity generate unique experiences of racism for minorities of immigrant origins. In addition to stigmatization encountered by other minorities and immigrants, they also face symbolic exclusion that delegitimizes their claims to membership in the national community.

Previous research on African Americans and destigmatization often focuses on how African Americans respond to racism without exploring their perceptions of the most significant obstacles facing members of their group. Specifically, studies of destigmatization often fail to establish whether or not African Americans believe that racism continues to be the most significant problem facing members of this group. Also focused on the micro level, Nicole Arlette Hirsch and Anthony Abraham Jack seek to fill this gap in the existing literature. Drawing upon 150 in-depth interviews with working-class and middle-class African American men and women, they explore

African Americans'perceptions of the most significant obstacles facing members of their group. They find that both working-class and middle-class respondents believe that racism remains the most significant problem facing African Americans. However, Hirsch and Jack also find important class differences when respondents assess other problems that they face. Middle-class respondents believe that lack of racial solidarity and economic problems are the second and third most significant problems facing African Americans respectively. In contrast, working-class respondents believe that fragility of the African American family is the second most significant problem and that racial solidarity is the third most significant problem facing African Americans. By demonstrating that African Americans believe that racism continues to be the most significant problem facing members of the group, Hirsch and Jack confirm the continued need for research on responses to stigmatization. Their article also shows the importance of focusing on the other obstacles that African Americans believe they face, including in-group issues such as racial solidarity and family fragility.

Finally, going even more micro, social psychologist Leanne Son Hing provides a review of the impact of discrimination on stigmatized group members' stress, well-being, mental and physical health, and performance. Son Hing argues that a great deal of variability in responses to stigmatization should be expected because people differ in their stress responses to stigmatization. She argues that, to understand how stressful stigmatization is for the individuals who experience it, one must consider their primary appraisals (i.e., assessments of how threatening and harmful the stigmatization is) and secondary appraisals (i.e., assessments of whether they have the resources to cope). Son Hing's analysis of the literature reveals that factors, such as caring strongly about doing well in a domain for which one's group is negatively stereotyped and believing that a lot of stigma exits, make people more vulnerable to stigmatization because they view it as more harmful and more self-relevant. She also finds that factors, such as identification with one's ingroup and psychological optimism, make people more resilient to stigmatization because they believe they have the resources needed to cope with it. Her work suggests that important steps can be taken to mitigate the negative impact of stigmatization by increasing devalued group members' resources. How is collective memory related to stigma management at the micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis?

Future research on stigma and responses to stigma should continue to systematically compare whether and how various types of stigma (age, race, ethnicity, religion, etc.) are salient across contexts, and how those who suffer the indignity of stigmatization respond to it (by internalizing, covering, repairing, confronting, assimilating, adapting, managing the self, etc.). But there are many other questions that have yet to be addressed. For instance, does a visible stigma operate the same way as an invisible one? Does a sonic stigma (being judged persistently too noisy, as analyzed in Schwarz (2012)) operate the same as visible stigma? How is a stigmatized identity evaluated? Or, in a different vein, what do individual destigmatization strategies teach us about spatial destigmatization projects exemplified by mixed income housing? How are responses shaped by transnational identities (such as in the case of Jewish Canadians touring Israel) and by globalization and technology more generally?

More broadly, what can sociologists studying stigma learn from psychologists and vice-versa? What can be done to put the various relevant literatures in sustained and constructive dialogue with one another? What questions are best addressed by these various literatures? This special feature, together with previous work, only

begins to scratch the surface of such questions. We hope that it will inspire additional research and mobilize a wide range of analytical tools in the pursuit of this goal.

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NOTE

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