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From 'Having' to 'Being:'

Self-Worth and the Current Crisis of American Society[1]

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Abstract

With growing inequality, the American Dream is becoming less effective as a collective myth. With its focus on material success, competition and self-reliance, the intensified diffusion of neoliberal scripts of the self is leading the upper-middle class toward a mental health crisis while the working class and low-income groups do not have the resources needed to live the dream. African-Americans, Latinos and undocumented immigrants, who are presumed to lack self-reliance, face more rigid boundaries. One possible way forward is broadening cultural membership by promoting new narratives of hope centered on a plurality of criteria of worth, 'ordinary universalism' and destigmatizing stigmatized groups.

Keywords

Inequality, recognition, cultural membership, American dream, inclusion, narratives

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Introduction: The Challenge Ahead

American society currently faces important challenges and needs to find a way forward. The American dream is becoming less effective as a collective myth. In the context of growing inequality, upward mobility appears out of reach for a growing number, and is losing its appeal for many, including overworked professionals and executives. After several decades where ethno-racial minority groups came to be regarded as worthy members of society, their social inclusion is now on the decline by some measures: As the accelerated diffusion of neoliberalism fosters a strong emphasis on self-reliance, various stigmatized groups believed to be a drag on society are now facing stronger rejection.

One possible way forward is to extend cultural membership to the largest number by broadening criteria of self-worth from "having" to "being," and by institutionalizing them through various means.[2] Moving from 'having' to 'being' entails valuing oneself (and others) based on their relations to others, experiences, moral and other qualities rather than on what material resources one has. This could be achieved in part by fostering new narratives of hope[3] centered on the promotion of a plurality of criteria of worth and of 'ordinary universalism,' and on the destigmatization of stigmatized groups. A growing number of Americans evaluate themselves using the standards of success that prevail in the upper-middle class, which they cannot possibly meet given their limited resources. Facing this absurd situation, we need to consider how to foster conditions that promote both collective and individual well-being.

The cultural approach I propose is not meant *to supplement, but to complement* the usual policy focus on the distribution of material resources (e.g. through universal welfare programs) and expands it to consider the lack of socio-cultural recognition,[4] an often neglected dimension of inequality (as argued by Lamont 2018; but see Edin et al. 2017). It also complements more political approaches to social inclusion that focus on citizenship, immigration and naturalization policies (e.g. Banting and Kymlicka 2013; Asad and Clair 2018). *The challenges we face are multidimensional—cultural and social structural at once—and they should be tackled from multiple angles*.[5] Much of the focus has been on the distribution of resources and the alleviation of inequality and poverty. It is high time that we give stigmatization and social inclusion their due.

This programmatic paper suggests questions and an analytical frame to stimulate a collective conversation that can influence policies and promote remedies. Such reflections can orient discussions as societies face transitions. For instance, Michael Sandel's *What Money Can't Buy* (2013) stimulated public debates about individualism in China just as this society was experiencing a rapid growth in consumption. Similarly, in *How Democracies Die,* political scientists Levitsky and Ziblatt's (2018) mobilized their expertise about the rise of authoritarianism in twentieth century Europe and Latin America to invite Americans to reflect on threats to democracy in the Trump era. Conversely, I aim to help us think through the roots of cultural challenges American society faces and the way forward. This reflection has implications beyond the United States, given its long-lasting international cultural influence and the growing prevalence of neoliberalism in many advanced industrial societies.

Broadening cultural membership could help Americans overcome the pessimism and anger that increased inequality and the Trump administration are feeding in many segments of the population.[6] The growing anger and resentment of white working-class people who feel

displaced by deindustrialization, globalization, and unemployment has been consistently evoked to explain the wins of right-wing populism in the United States and across advanced industrial societies (see the Special issue of the *British Journal of Sociology* on this topic (fall 2017; Dodd et al 2017)). Finding ways to rekindle their sense of self-worth among white workers is an urgent task, especially at a time when xenophobia and social exclusion are generating a slew of new social conflicts (*viz* at this writing, the demonstrations of the "*gilets jaunes*" in France.)

Part One clarify the questions I address and the perspective I develop. Then, the argument unfolds as follows: **Part Two** offers a diagnosis of the current moment, with a focus on the crisis of the American dream, with particular attention to its impact on the upper-middle class and the working class and the poor. I also offer some evidence that boundaries toward ethno-racial minorities and immigrants have been hardened in recent years, when considered through the angle of white-majority attitudes toward these groups. **Part Three** considers one specific way forward by focusing on how to broaden cultural membership by promoting a plurality of criteria of worth, emphasizing 'ordinary universalism' and destigmatizing stigmatized groups.

Part One: Questions and Perspective:

Plurality of Criteria of Worth and Declining Collective Well-Being

My chosen title 'From Having to Being' will resonate among those of us who have read Herbert Marcuse's classic critique of consumerism, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), which had a profound effect on the May '68 generation. Like Marcuse and German philosopher Eric Fromm,[7] I am concerned with the criteria of evaluation we use to assess our lives, at a time when material success ('having') dominates all other dimensions of human achievement. Drawing from Fromm's concern with 'being' (capturing *shared experiences* and *productive activities*), I advocate that dominant evaluation criteria should also include other aspects of social life that we,

as human beings, mobilize to assess ourselves (not only as money-makers or occupational achievers, but also as parents, friends, community members, artistic creators, spiritual beings, etc.).

Such changes are timely after almost forty years of neoliberalism, at a time when the lifestyle and the values of the upper-middle class are systematically being offered as the ideal to pursue by all -- although *increasingly fewer have the means necessary to make it a reality*, as the middle class has seen its income significantly reduce post 2008 and the working class and low income populations face growing insecurity. This tension feeds the increased 'wear-and-tear' or allostatic load associated with inequality, and a decline in collective well-being manifested in lower life expectancy, the ongoing opioid epidemic, and increase in suicide (Hall and Lamont 2009; Case and Deaton 2015).[8]

Even the alleged economic winner of this growing inequality, the upper-middle class, cannot be triumphant --(this group is defined here as college-educated professionals and executives, who are concentrated in the top 20 per cent of the income ladder).[9] Indeed, despite its economic prosperity, this class has seen a downturn in its quality of life (Ehrenreich 1989). Competitiveness and economic concerns feed overwork (Weis et al. 2014; Cooper 2014) and a decline in mental health that (one study suggests) is more acute for this group than that faced by those living in poverty (see also Schieman et al (2006) on the "stress of higher status). We will see that while the college-age population (where the upper-middle and middle classes are overrepresented) is experiencing a massive mental health crisis, many are seeking a way forward beyond material success and privilege, and are instead searching for their passion and aim to have a range of experiences.

Social Resilience, Hope, and Cultural Repertoires

I focus on narratives of hope because they are essential for social resilience. This has been suggested by (among others) Eggerman and Bricks (2010), two Yale medical anthropologists who studied children living in the Syrian refugee camps of Lebanon. They found that the children's ability to hope and project themselves into the future, and to share a narrative with a significant other (defined by sociologists as a person with significant influence on an individual's self-concept) plays a central role in fostering resilience (also Yeager and Dweck 2012; Frye 2012).

I am not concerned with 'grit' or the individual resilience (Duckworth 2016) that preoccupies some psychologists and that has been embraced by many governmental agencies to promote self-sufficiency, by neoliberal think tanks such as the World Bank to promote development (Joseph 2013; Felli 2016), and by neoconservative movements to promote the market (Vaïsse 2010). Instead, building on the work of the Successful Societies program (Hall and Lamont 2009; 2013) which I co-led for seventeen years, [10] I focus on how social resilience, a capacity of groups, is enabled by institutions (for instance, policies and the law) that send messages about who belongs, who matters, and who is worthy. I am also concerned with cultural repertoires people have at their disposal to make sense of their lives and the tools they can mobilize to buffer themselves from negative messages about themselves (stigma in particular—Lamont et al. 2016). This kind of resilience does not depend primarily on the moral fortitude of exceptional individuals who have the strength to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, but on features of the environment—and more specifically in this article, by the availability of narratives about possible selves (Markus and Nurios 1986) that resonate, inspire, and provide hope.

The availability of alternative narratives can buffer people from the stressors associated with inequality and foster collective well-being. This is illustrated by the sizable reduction of

attempted suicide among LGBTQ youth following the adoption of same-sex marriage across 32 states:[11] these laws have been interpreted by them as providing much-needed visibility and recognition, although this group has an ambivalent attitude toward marriage as an institution (Hull 2018).

While I focus here on the importance of changing narratives, I conceive of these changes as achieved through both cognition and practice in everyday interactions and as enabled by various types of resources, including networks and cultural repertoires (rules in Sewell 2005). Drawing on Fraser and Honneth (2004), I approach stigmatization and the distribution of resources as interacting dimensions of injustice and inequality (Lamont 2018).

Dreaming an Impossible Dream

The American dream worked as an extraordinarily powerful engine *qua* script for American society for most of the twentieth century, and especially in the post World War II period of economic growth. The term was allegedly first used in print by J. T. Adams in *The Epic of America* (1931; Samuel 2012), and quickly diffused broadly to the point where it contributed to attracting immigrants to US shores, encouraged the GI Bill generation to aim for the sky, and fed the extraordinary expansion of American higher education that followed. As a remarkably performing 'hope machine', it proved capable of appealing to hearts and minds and of consistently orienting action. Indeed, it provided 'vocabularies of motive' (Mills 1944; Burke 1945) for a great many people and for a great many years. A close cousin of the notions of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny (Bouchard 2019),[12] this collective myth fostered collective prosperity at the same time as it deftly obfuscated that American material prosperity was achieved by no small measure on the back of the expropriated native Americans and the underpaid women and African Americans and other minorities.

The four tenets on which the American dream is based are: 1) equality of opportunity, so that the dream is perceived as accessible to all; 2) the hope of success; 3) the view that success results from actions and traits under one's control; and 4) the belief that success is associated with virtue (Hochschild 1995: chapter 1). As a myth anchoring a collective identity, this dream provided American citizens a normative sense of direction to their actions (toward building prosperity), standards by which to determine who belongs (the materially/professionally successful), and a notion of who deserves our trust (e.g., those who try) and of which groups deserve to be stigmatized (e.g., those who are lazy and lack self-reliance). Therefore, *the American dream has exercised a powerful influence on group boundaries in the United States*, especially when operating in combination with the scripts of the self that are associated with neoliberalism, as detailed below. This myth is essential for connecting the main drivers of American boundary work, meritocracy and self-reliance, which structure support for the upper half and the stigmatization of the lower half—the poor and kindred groups (Lamont 1992).

With a fixation on distribution, social scientists are often concerned with ways to grow the pie or move its pieces this way or that way so that it can benefit more people. A recent case in point is Chetty et al. (2017)'s widely discussed study of the decline in upward mobility in contemporary American society. Researchers often equate realizing the dream with joining the upper-middle or middle classes—achieving all the typical markers of a middle-class social trajectory, such as getting college and advanced degrees, becoming an executive, professional, or entrepreneur, buying a spacious home, and ideally purchasing the 'comfort level' associated with the top 20 per cent of the population. They often overlook the simple fact that *100 per cent of the population cannot be squeezed into the top 20 per cent of the income distribution*, particularly after decades of growing inequality. This is precisely what makes the American dream an impossible dream for most—an unfulfillable promise (Mijs 2016: 16), while experts continue to

promote the notion that more people should have access to the dream, despite well-established patterns of failure.

In contrast, I believe the American dream is increasing a bankrupt promise of prosperity that does not deliverer, and which needs to be at the very least supplemented by other narratives of hope that can foster greater social inclusion. We will see that this requires improving our understanding of the production and diffusion of collective scenarios about our future moving forward. This is where cumulative knowledge from my subfield of sociology, cultural sociology, can be of particular use.

Historically, the American dream pertained not only to the possibility of achieving upward mobility, but also to the promise of equal opportunity and social inclusion (Martin Luther King's dream, which Barack Obama aimed to rekindle with his 2008 electoral message, focused on hope (Tesler and Sears 2010; Alexander and Jarowsky 2015)). Highlighting the impoverishment of the myth may allow us to ground new narratives of hope in the cultural scripts of the past, and thus strengthen them by giving them a broader base.[13]

Neoliberal Scripts of the Self and Recognition Gaps

My analysis posits the spread of neoliberalism, which, following Evans and Sewell (2013), I regard as a set of syncretic changes operating simultaneously at the economic, political, administrative, and cultural levels to maximize market efficiency and the free exchange of goods.[14] With this expansive definition in the background, this paper is exclusively concerned with cultural aspects of these changes, that is, with the *scripts of the self* that predate neoliberalism but have become widely dominant under neoliberalism, and that emphasize material success, social status, competitiveness, and the privatization of risk (or self-reliance).[15]

These scripts reinforce the salience of virtues associated with the American dream, with a focus on material success, competitiveness, and the like.

Experts agree that various neoliberal policies diffused rapidly since the 1980s, as they were promoted early on by the administrations of Ronald Reagan in the US and of Margaret Thatcher in the UK. Figure I represents the diffusion of the term between 1978 and 2017 as captured by mentions of the word in the LexisNexis database of digitalized media information (also Centeno and Cohen 2012; Harvey 2005). The salience of the term increased particularly rapidly over the last five years, with an impressive jump (from 686 to 1714 mentions) from 2015 to 2016—displaying roughly equal presence in European and American media. The influence of neoliberal scripts of the self is likely to parallel these trends, with the election of Donald Trump to the American presidency as a high point. These scripts are prominently featured in the media on a daily basis. In particular, they are conspicuously embodied, celebrated and promoted by an American president whose success in dominating the news cycle is remarkable.[16]

Insert Figure I about here

I will present some evidence suggesting that concomitant with the accelerated diffusion of neoliberalism, association with these scripts is influencing whether specific classes and social groups are perceived as worthy or stigmatized. For the United States in particular:

- The group that best demonstrates the neoliberal virtues of material success, competitiveness, and self-reliance, the upper-middle class, is hegemonic, as manifested by the strengthening of popular belief in meritocracy found in many advanced societies (Mijs 2018a) and by their predominant presence in the media where their lifestyle is offered as a model to which all should aspire.

- Classes that are perceived as least self-reliant, such the working class and low-income people, are comparatively less salient and often stigmatized, with important ripple effects for various groups such as African Americans and undocumented immigrants who are often perceived as using a disproportionate share of collective resources and who are often conflated with the poor (perceptions of policing and racial hierarchies lead them to choose neighborhoods that are in greater proximity to poor US-born Latinos and poor US-born blacks (Asad and Rosen 2018).

This bifurcation is likely to result in a growing recognition gap that feeds the remarkable multiplication of claims that we have witnessed over the last ten years (#BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo in particular), with four of the top five largest protests in American history – all anti-Trump-- having taken place in the last two years (the two Women's Marches, the March for Science and the youth-led anti-gun violence March for our Lives each estimated to have a turnout of around 1 million) (Dockay 2018 reporting on the Crowd Counting Project). Note that these movements are often led by upper-middle class members of otherwise subordinated groups (along race, gender, sexuality or political (progressive-liberal) grounds). They may be more concerned with contesting the domination of the upper-middle class itself, than of a world dominated by a white, male, heterosexual and right-leaning culture.

This exceptional level of mobilization is evidence of the urgency of developing a more sophisticated understanding of recognition gaps and how to address them (Lamont 2018). This can be achieved in part by promoting new narratives of hope via scripts of self that broaden cultural membership, with a focus on promoting a plurality of criteria of worth and 'ordinary universalism' (defined what the non-college educated believe makes people equal/compatible/similar), as well as the destigmatization of stigmatized groups.

While new scripts of self alone will not alleviate the increasingly cruel class inequality, they may help individuals avoid internalizing stigmatization and imagining other objectives for themselves than "making it to the top" – objectives that are less dependant on material resources. At the societal level, such scripts may also weaken boundaries based on self-reliance, with positive effects on the social inclusion of low-income people and groups stereotypically associated with them (African-Americans, immigrants, etc.) While cultural change depends on economic change (as described for instance in Iversen and Soskice (2019)'s analysis of the knowledge economy), it does not only follow social change: it can also orient and accelerate it in a multitude of ways.

With this broad sketch in mind, I expand on the diagnosis of the current crisis American society faces.

Part Two: Diagnosis of the Current Moment

Part Two offers some evidence of the fragilization of the American dream, the plight and cultural hegemony of the upper-middle class, and the troubles of the desperate bottom half,[17] before offering some evidence of the rigidification of group boundaries that has developed with the spread of neoliberalism. While the trends I describe are complex, my review of the available evidence is necessarily limited and my conclusions preliminary, to be developed in a book in progress.

The Fragility of the American dream

Many economists have written about the acute concentration of wealth that characterizes the American economy today, especially since the 2008 recession. In particular, Wolff (2018) has shown that the wealthiest 1 per cent of American households owned 40 per cent of the

country's wealth in 2017. That share was higher than it has been at any point since at least 1962, and was predicted to grow further following the 2017 Federal Tax Reform (Stiglitz 2017).

Concomitantly, it has become far more difficult for Americans of various classes to move up the social ladder: again Raj Chetty et al. (2017) have demonstrated how upward mobility is now the privilege of a diminishing number of individuals. More specifically, only 50 per cent of children born in 1984 can earn more than their parents at the same age, compared to 92 per cent of the children born in 1940. [18]

Still, 73 per cent of American adults believe it is possible to 'start poor and become rich in the US') (CBS News Poll 2016) despite historically high levels of economic inequality and a decline in intergenerational mobility rates. In general, belief in the American dream remains high (Newport 2018; Gallup Organization 2018;[19] George Washington University Battleground Poll 2018),[20] as most Americans believe the US is still a country of opportunity where material success is within reach.[21] Belief in meritocracy– that "who gets ahead in society is decided by hard work" -- is considerably higher in the United States, than in France, Germany, and the UK (Mijs 2018b; see Figure II). It increased from 90 percent to 96 percent between 1980 and 2010s in the United States, but remained stable at around 84 percent throughout this period in the United Kingdom.[22]

Insert Figure II about here

Nevertheless, the dream has weakened with the deterioration of the conditions for its realization. Its fragility manifests itself in various ways: 1) about 68 percent of people believed

the economic system was fair and 29 percent perceived it as unfair in 1998, compared to 50 percent and 44 percent respectively by 2013 (Dugan and Newport 2013);[23] 2) 48 percent of adults believed that life for the next generation will be worse in 2014, while 78 percent of Americans believe "it will take the next generation more efforts to advance" by 2017 (Pew Research Poll 2017; 3) The difference in the number of college and high school graduate who believe they can achieve the American dream has been growing over time;[24] 4) more people have come to perceive the dream tenable for themselves, but not for society as a whole (Bowman et al. 2014);[25] 5) the group most immune to questioning the myth is immigrants. In one 2016 survey, more than three-quarters of Hispanics (77 per cent) believed that most people can get ahead with hard work, compared to 62 percent of the US public. This belief is stronger among immigrants generation than second generation Latinos (Lopez et al. 2018).

But again, independently of the fact that how much Americans believe in the American dream, there is ample evidence that the dream is not delivering for a vast number of people. This is supported by a brief discussion of how each class is faring in the current moment.

The Relative Plight of the Upper-Middle Class

Together with the upper class, the upper-middle class has benefitted from a "winner-takes-all" economy and became the unmitigated winner of the economic changes we have experienced over the last decades, especially when compared with the middle class: according to data the Pew Research Center has gathered for several decades (Kochhar 2018), the median income of the upper-income group was 2.2 times that of middle-income households and 6.3 times the income of lower-income households in 1970. By 2016, the income ratios increased to 2.4 and 7.3, respectively. As for the wealth gap between upper-income families and lower- and middle-income families, it reached its highest level recorded by 2016 (Kochhar 2018) and

differences are now staggering. According to Wolff, by 2017 'The top 20 percent of households actually own a whopping 90 percent of the stuff in America… That leaves just 10 percent of the pie for the remaining 80 percent of the populace' (Wolff 2017 cited by Ingraham 2017). This group also combines economic, cultural, and social capital that can be are converted into all kinds of advantages, such as access to the best schools, real estate markets and metropolitan areas that operate as a social 'escalator' for accelerated upward mobility (Le Galès and Pierson 2019).

In *Money, Morals, and Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Middle Class* (Lamont 1992), I documented how male professionals and managers living in Indianapolis and the New York area defined a worthy self by mobilizing criteria of socio-economic success, together with morality in the late eighties. Based on eighty in-depth interviews, I explored the meanings and weight these men gave to money, power, competition, morality (including self-reliance) in detail, including regional variations (with more weight put on money than morals in the New York suburbs as compared to Indianapolis). I expect that they continue to give as much if not more weight to socioeconomic criteria of evaluation (to be confirmed by re-interviews (in progress) of respondents surveyed for Lamont et al (2016) and others).

Despite its privileged position, this upper-middle class has been experiencing considerable challenges since 2008. Increasingly, a 'fear of falling' (documented by Ehrenreich (1989) is spreading within this group, with wide-ranging ramifications. Take fertility decisions for instance: analysing data from a 2018 survey conducted by Morning Consult for *The New York Times*, we find that 21 per cent of individuals in the higher income group explain having fewer children than they had hoped by their 'inability to afford.' This was the case for only 14 per cent of those in the lower income group (Miller 2018).[26] This difference of 7 points is

surprising given the relatively greater resources the higher income group has access to. This group could be more oriented toward passing on class privileges, and therefore have a higher estimate of the cost of raising children. It could also be particularly concerned about its economic position, at the very same time that the latter is firmly consolidating. This paradoxical fear has been attributed to anxieties connected to globalization and other factors that are beyond its control (Weis et al. 2016). The 2008 recession triggered worries about the possible downward mobility of their children that is not easily curbed. Having few children, they invest heavily in education as a form of insurance (Ehrenreich 1989), and engage in an 'application frenzy' that is a form of intensified 'class work' (Weis 2014: 5). They cannot resist 'concerted cultivation'[27] and 'helicopter parenting' as they aim to position their children to have access to the best colleges by hiring tutors and college counsellors and by engaging in an array of other behaviours aimed at passing on privileges (Weis et al. 2014; Steinberg 2009).[28] These parents have been criticized for turning their children into 'excellent sheep' who can repeat what they are taught but show little creativity (Deresiewicz 2014). Studies show that parents cultivate a strong belief in meritocracy and are blind to the ways in which they pass on privileges.[29]

As the object of this intense parental investment, the upper-middle-class youth faces considerable pressure to succeed. Their lives of hyper-competition lead many to feel overwhelmed and to engage in substance abuse. Surprisingly, these responses and behaviours are more prevalent among high-income kids than among inner city kids (in contrast to widely-spread stereotypes) (Luthar and D'Avanzo 1999). While such pressures are particularly acute at and near the top of the social structure, they are also pervasive among many college students: the UCLA National Survey of Freshman showed a significant increase in the number of students surveyed who say that they are feeling overwhelmed, increasing from 18 per cent in 1985 to 34 per cent in 2015.

Similarly, the American College Health Association (2017) reported a significant increase in undergraduates feeling 'overwhelming anxiety' in the past years, rising from 50 per cent in 2011 to 62 per cent in 2016. While these trends may be due in part to increased awareness of mental illness and the growing salience of middle-class healthism (Greenhalgh and Wessily 2004) and therapeutic culture (Illouz 2009; Hook et al 2018), they have also been attributed to the spread of neoliberal values: as stated by Curran and Hill (2017: 4) based on a comparative study, 'Young people appear to have internalized irrational social ideals of the perfectible self that, while unrealistic, are to them eminently desirable and obtainable. Broadly speaking, then, increasing levels of perfectionism might be considered symptomatic of the way in which young people are coping—to feel safe, connected, and of worth—in neoliberalism's new culture of competitive individualism'. These speculate that the observed increase is 'because, generally, American, Canadian, and British cultures have become more individualistic, materialistic, and socially antagonistic over this period, with young people now facing more competitive environments, more unrealistic expectations, and more anxious and controlling parents than generations before.'[30]

The college-age population has also seen increases in suicides and in drug consumption, leading the American Psychological Association to issue express warnings about an epidemic of mental health problems which, again surprisingly, is strongest among youth in the highest annual income household bracket (as compared to the low-income level group). This trend is explained by youth isolation from their parents (figuratively and literally), which fosters mental health problems (Luthar 2003).

Similar mental-health problems are affecting individuals in the upper income bracket (greater than $75,000), adults (55 years old and more), and non-Hispanic whites (Weinberger et al. 2018).[31] Money and work are cited as the most common reasons for stress by these higher

income adults. Also, overwork is associated with a decline in quality of life and in subjective well-being (Schor 1993; Moen et al. 2013). While allostatic load is typically lower for low SES individuals due to a lack of autonomy at work, scarcity of resources, and other factors (Szanton et al. 2005), an intensified concern with status, material success, and competition in the upper income group may be affecting this relationship, to the point where evidence of a positive association between socio-economic status, stress, and allostatic load and subjective well-being is weakening (Dowd et al. 2009) or is now interpreted as inconclusive (Stevenson and Wolfers 2018).

While some downplay (or even ridicule) the mental illness faced by a resource-rich upper-middle class, such problems are nevertheless hurtful and dampen the relative attractiveness of their position. This is particularly the case if members of these groups become blind to their own advantage. As they increasingly congregate *en masse* in expensive neighbourhoods that are catchment areas for the best schools—especially for Whites (Reardon and Bischoff 2011) and for families with children (Owens 2016), the affluent become spatially segregated from other social classes, which leads them to compare their fate to that of other higher-income people. They can easily lose perspective on their own advantages, and experience relative deprivation,[32] with deleterious effects to their subjective well-being (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). Many find comfort in class homophily, which provides ontological security and "safety," which are viewed as a pre-condition for experiencing feelings of community (*entre soi*),[33] particularly in American cities where perceptions of violence and other dangers often lurk in the background (Crowder and South 2008; Lessiter and Niedt 2013; Kruse 2005).[34] Addressing the roots of their anxiety in a world that celebrates competition and unlimited material and professional success is imperative. Broadening how we define a worthy self (from

having to *being*) and institutionalizing new criteria of evaluation in our personal and institutional lives could contribute to bring about the change we need.

The Cultural Hegemony of Professionals and Executives

Despite the downsides of upper-middle class membership, this group is repeatedly offered as a model for everyone to follow. This is evidenced by a study conducted by media expert Richard Butsch: In a content analysis of over 400 primetime American sitcoms, totalling 68 years of television, he found that 90 per cent of all the characters on these sitcoms were either upper-middle-class professionals and managers or working class (Butsch 2017). Of this number, the share of working-class characters was only 10 per cent, with an increase of only one per cent over the last 10 years. In the vast majority of the cases, working-class men were represented as buffoons or as incompetent, immature, ignorant, and irresponsible. A parallel analysis conducted on a sample of television programs presented in Sweden (which includes 30 per cent of American programs) reaches similar conclusions (Jackobson and Stiernstedt 2018).[35]

Relatedly, a student of political communication, Eunji Kim (2018) compared the effect of watching rags-to-riches reality tv shows to reality tv shows without this narrative on believing in the American dream. She found that watching such programs has a significant effect on this belief, particularly among Republicans and those who are politically optimistic. Kim establishes that the impact of watching such programs on embracing the American dream is as strong as that of being the children of immigrants. If exposure to rags to riches stories in entertainment television, which has grown exponentially in recent years (ibid), strengthens belief in the American dream, much of entertainment television operates as a gigantic publicity machine for the distinctive scripts of self that are associated with the neoliberal virtues that the upper-middle class incarnates. The reality of the working class simply is overwhelmingly absent in

entertainment television. This can encourage workers to progressively identify themselves and naturalize the upper-middle class world they observe, and to come to consider their own conditions as a shameful aberration (Sennett and Cobb 1972).

Just as the American dream eulogizes the upper-middle class, it also celebrates the rich. This certainly affects attitudes toward this class, as hypothesized above (p. 11). Indeed, from survey data, Bartels (2016) and McCall (2013) reveal a reluctance to tax the rich in the United States, particularly if they are perceived as contributing to wealth redistribution by fostering economic growth through their activities.[36] Note however, that Bartels (2016) finds strong support for egalitarian values among most Americans, and McCall (2013) finds widespread disapproval for high levels of income inequality. This encourages the upper income groups to downplay their advantages and to aim to display a democratic ethos (Sherman 2017). Both encourage the philanthropic tradition, a specific historical configuration through which solidarity and altruism are expressed, and which is somewhat antithetical to the statist tradition (Jepperson 2002).

The Desperate Fate of the Bottom Half

What of the working class? In the early 1990s, I interviewed fifty male blue-collar workers and low-status white-collar workers without a college degree for *The Dignity of Working Men* (1992). I found that these American workers, who resided in Indianapolis and in the New York City region, were somewhat critical toward the upper-middle class—'the Ken and Barbie people' as they were dubbed by one worker. Members of this group were often described as workaholics obsessed with material success and socio-professional status, and as domineering and self-centred, lacking in concern for others. I argued that these American workers were more under the spell of the upper-middle class than their French counterparts, due to the relative

absence in the United States of cultural repertoires celebrating working-class solidarity. More concretely, workers were more likely to measure their value by the standards of socio-economic success, which made it more likely that they thought of themselves as 'losers' than French workers, since they could not possibly score well by the criteria they valued most (in contrast to French workers who demonstrated more cultural distance and cynicism toward upper-middle-class values).

To measure oneself everyday by the standards of middle-class consumption can only lead to self-destruction if the means of accessing this status are unattainable. This is where diversifying the criteria of worth (from *having* to valuing various types of *being*) could be empowering—and not only for the bottom half. Of course, this broadening would not make poverty or insecurity disappear, but it could reduce the sting of not being able to embrace competition or to indulge in the frenzied pursuit of consumption and status. Institutionalizing a plurality of criteria of worth can only contribute to collective well-being.

The pernicious effects of measuring one's self by material success could be greater today than in the early nineties, given the growth in inequality, the declining standards of living among the non-college educated, and the growing differentiation between urban and rural/small town population.. For many working-class people, their personal ability to make their American dream a reality appears as an ever more distant and unreachable objective, with all but a few left empty-handed.[37] Based on recent evidence, Cherlin (2013) argues that as working-class men are increasingly unable to perform their role as provider due to the absence of stable jobs, fewer marry and have children. They often isolate themselves and are not as involved in voluntary and religious organizations like their fathers were. Many experience despair and engage in substance abuse. When confronted with such a dire situation, it is imperative that we find a way to reconsider how we define a worthy person, and how to move toward a more inclusive society.

What of the boundaries toward low-income people? While many Americans support income distribution in the United States (Brook and Manza 2007), Gilens (2000) has shown persistent boundaries toward welfare recipients who are thought to lack in self-sufficiency, ambition, and a sense of responsibilty. This can be accounted for by dominant explanations for the stigmatized conditions of the poor which assume 'that many, if not most, of the destitute are undeserving: that large numbers of poor people exist in an intergenerational 'culture of poverty'; that social insurance is preferable to welfare, which is wasteful and demoralizing; that wise public policy seeks to prevent destitution, not to provide income maintenance; that work, not welfare, is the essence of a meaningful life' (Peterson 1981: vii).

The Dignity of Working Men (2000) showed how white American working-class men drew strong moral boundaries toward the poor, contrasting their own 'disciplined self' with the alleged laziness and lack of self-reliance of the poor, and of poor African Americans in particular. Post-2008, at a time when so many workers feel that they have been 'cut adrift' (Cooper 2014), many believe that little stands between themselves and homelessness. They look to the poor with fear and anxiety, often mixed in with a healthy dose of moral disdain, especially at a time when under the growing influence of neoliberalism, "getting a handout" is increasingly widely viewed as shameful (Williamson 2017; Gest 2016).

The perception that there are groups of welfare beneficiaries who are untrustworthy and undeserving has grown markedly in the United States (Cavaillé and Trump 2015). Moreover, there has been a decline in solidarity towards particular groups of welfare recipients based on criteria of merit in European societies (Bloemraad et al., 2019 for details).[38] Single mothers, the unemployed, the disabled, and immigrants are viewed as undeserving, but not the elderly or the sick (van Oorschot 2006; Lomax-Cook 1979, for the US).

The economic conditions that led to a right-wing retrenchment of welfare benefits and to the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) by the Clinton Administration in 1996 has fuelled a moralistic anti-poor rhetoric— at the same time as the declining influence of unions and left-of-centre advocacy organizations and parties reduced the social salience of solidarity discourse. These policy changes were meant to "incentivize" the poor to demonstrate financial self-sufficiency, but they often lead them to financial ruins (Green 2017). Also, many came to rely on psychiatric diagnoses to justify disability benefits, thereby stigmatizing poverty as 'permanent medical pathology' (Hansen et al. 2014). Such changes hardened symbolic boundaries directed at low-income people, and particularly at able-bodied men among them (Lomax-Cook 1979).

To this day, the basic American structure of moral class boundaries continues to be approving of 'people above' (Lamont 2000; McCall 2013). Americans show preferential support of policies that benefit the rich (Bartels 2016), which often goes hand in hand with a rejection of policies that directly benefit the poor (in favour of non-traditional forms of redistribution such as education) (McCall 2013; Franko 2016; Williamson 2017), and with outright expressions of resentment of welfare recipients (Gest 2016). In the American land of abundance and opportunity, the identification of market success with divine favour and personal worth has continuously fostered the view that poverty signals personal failure (Katz 1989).

Against this background, low-income populations are often so deeply stigmatized to the point where they are rarely perceived as such and typically become invisible. Being powerless and depleted, few mobilize politically to defend their rights and humanity— with a few exceptions, such as the twentieth century poor people's movements analysed by Piven and Cloward (1978) and parts of the global Occupy movement (Ancelovici et al. 2016). Low levels of solidarity are in practice attenuated by a deep and significant tradition of interpersonal

altruism that characterizes American civic and religious culture and permeates everyday interaction (Wuthnow 1993). This tradition contributes to keeping alive an exceptionally strong tradition of volunteerism in the United States (Fischer 2010).

Despite this final note of optimism, I have presented a rather sombre diagnosis that points to a growing disconnect between the ideals that American society offers its members and what it actually delivers across classes. This paradoxical and untenable tension feeds hopelessness and other social ills, such as mounting violence in low-income neighbourhoods (Sharkey 2018), the raging opioid epidemic, and the growing self-isolation of the working class. It also feeds the surprisingly low life satisfaction and relatively poor mental health of the upper-middle class—a less deleterious but nevertheless significant problem that cannot only be addressed through individual and cognitive solutions (*vis* the current popularity of mindfulness and healthism) Taking a close look at the recent rigidification of boundaries toward ethno-racial groups further confirms the urgency of the situation.

Changing Symbolic Boundaries: African Americans, Hispanics, and Immigrants

The growing stigmatization of poverty brings about a hardening of boundaries toward groups stereotyped as lacking in self-sufficiency—African Americans, Hispanics, and immigrants.[39] These groups are often viewed as drawing more on collective resources than the average American: they are presumed to abuse the educational and health systems to which they are viewed as contributing little (especially undocumented immigrants). Lack of self-reliance feeds resentment from white working-class men who define themselves as 'survivors' and responsible citizens, and who are deeply critical of parasites who live off their blood, toil, tears, and sweat (Lamont 2000, chapter 2).

Bloemraad et al (2019) review the literature in political theory, psychology and sociology supporting the extension of national membership to religious and ethno-racial minorities across the United States and Europe since World War II. We are now witnessing a reversion of this long trend as expressed by the recent popularity of anti-immigrant right-wing populism in Europe and the United States (Eger and Valdez 2015). I offer some evidence of recent changes in attitudes toward African Americans, Hispanics, and immigrants. I draw on data on changing attitudes toward various groups from the American National Election Study 'group thermometer' that measures warmth toward various groups over recent decades. This data reveals a downturn in warmth toward minority groups between 1983 and 2016 which are more significant for Republicans than for Democrats and Independents. While a more comprehensive analysis of the evidence is necessary before drawing firmer conclusion, my analysis is suggestive of trends that could consolidate in the decades ahead.

Figure III shows a steady increase in warm feelings toward African Americans from 1983 to 2004 for all groups, followed by a significant and steady decline among Republicans (from 66 per cent to 59 per cent feeling warm between 2004 and 2016), and a small decline among Democrats (from 78 to 75 per cent between 2011 and 2016).

Insert Figure III about here

A mix of factors may have fed this downturn, and it is likely that only some of them are associated with the neoliberal emphasis on self-sufficiency, as was the case for the popular opposition to Obama's health care policy (Knowles et al. 2010) fed in part by Tea Party rhetoric

(Skocpol and Williamson 2016) against 'freeloaders'—immigrants, the poor, and the young in particular (Yadon and Piston 2018). Other relevant factors include the electoral use of racist dog-whistle rhetoric (Haney-Lopez 2015; Bobo 2017); a growing sense of group threat among Whites due to the changing demographic balance of the American population (Outen et al. 2012; Frey 2015), accentuated by the election of the first African-American president; and concern for reverse racism (Norton and Sommers 2011)-- in 2017, 55% of white Americans believed there is discrimination against white people today while 43% of whites do not believe such discrimination exists.[40]

Figure IV shows that after a period of steady growth in warmth toward Hispanics, a downturn far less acute than for Blacks took place, and only Republicans (with a decline from 66 to 63 per cent expressing warmth between 2015 and 2016 (Figure IV)). As argued by Flores and Schacter (2018), Hispanics are often presumed to be 'illegal' and to take advantage of public resources, such as welfare (Asad and Clair 2018). Attitudes toward undocumented immigrants deteriorate only slightly more (Figure V), with a decline of warmth from 43 to 40 per cent among Democrats stating in 2009, and from 36 to 28 per cent among Independents starting in 2004. These groups are similarly perceived as using more than their fair share of collective resources, such as Medicaid according to a right-wing foundation (Camarota 2015) -- despite being prohibited in most cases from accessing federal public assistance under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (states can provide state-sponsored Medicaid, but this varies from state to state). These trends contrast with warmth toward LGBTQ that show uninterrupted improvement over the period under consideration (Figure VI)—although support is more solid from some segments of the population than from others.[41] This is not surprising given that the LGBTQ community is not clearly associated with the poor (Clair et al. 2016).

Insert Figures IV, V, and VI about here

Some of these boundaries intensified during the 2016 presidential elections as Republicans fostered a backlash against diversity and African Americans in particular (Bobo 2017). A detailed study of the rhetoric used by Donald Trump in 73 of his electoral speeches has shown how these accentuated group boundaries and fed the anger of the working class by voicing their concerns about 'people above' (professionals, the rich, and politicians) and drawing strong moral boundaries toward undocumented immigrants, refugees, and Muslims. This study also revealed however that Trump approached African Americans and (legal) Hispanic Americans as workers who also deserve jobs, although he vilified both groups by the use of coded racial words such 'crime', 'rape', and 'the inner city' (Lamont et al. 2017). What lies ahead in a political context where each election is a terrain for negotiating the contested place of diversity in the American polity (e.g. Mendelberg 2001)? Ethno-racial divides continue to deepen, and we have yet to find a way forward.

Part Two discussed some of the cultural dynamics that contributed to the current crisis American society faces. The diagnosis I have offered emphasized 1) how neoliberal scripts are contributing to narrowing definitions of worth; 2) how these scripts feed a mental health crisis in the upper-middle class; 3) how they lead workers to embrace standards of worth they cannot possibly meet, and deepen the stigmatization of low-income populations; 4) how they extend the stigmatization of other groups often stereotypically associated with poverty (African Americans, Latinos, and immigrants). Neoliberal scripts of self interact with political and economic factors

that also contribute to this crisis—growing inequality, the crisis of our democratic institutions, etc. While acknowledging that a comprehensive analysis would discuss the dynamics between these various factors, I turn to properly cultural solutions to complement responses that most frequently target social structural factors, such as living wages and the provision of universal welfare benefits.

Part Three: A Way Forward

Narratives of Hope

Part Three argues for the importance of broadening cultural membership, which can act as a source of hope in a context where so many feel disrespected, isolated, angry, and resentful. The solutions I propose are meant to address problems of recognition that are particularly salient in the current historical moment. New scripts of worth could be a source of hope and thus promote resilience and subjective well-being (Hall and Lamont 2018).

There is urgency in fostering inclusion at a time when the American public is experiencing a high degree of political polarization: in *Uncivil Agreement*, Lilian Mason (2018) demonstrates increased antagonism across the political spectrum in recent decades and finds that oppositions are more grounded in identities and emotions than in actual policy divergence. This polarization is fostered by the increasingly siloed structure of the media, whereby social media feed different information to various segments of the population, with little overlap between Republican/conservative (e.g. Fox News) and liberal/progressive/Democratic media (Pariser 2011; also Benkler et al. (2017) based on an examination of retweets across the media positioned at opposite end of the political spectrum). In the United States, this political polarization is facilitated by the highly deregulated and hyper-commercial character of the media in the US

(since the 1996 TeleCom Act), which contrasts with the structure of the media in most European countries (Benson 2016).

I focus on three possible kinds of *messages* for greater inclusion: the promotion of a plurality of criteria of worth, 'ordinary universalism', and the destigmatization of stigmatized groups. I also refer briefly to different *pathway*s for diffusing such messages through institutions (universities, corporations, social movements) where actors (knowledge workers, social movement activists) can collaborate in transforming narratives and producing new frames of action.

Plurality of criteria of worth. This response consists in criticizing the current focus on neoliberal scripts of the self as a unidimensional social hierarchy that necessarily ranks winners and losers (based on their relative material resources), and to consider how to implement conditions facilitating the valorisation of various types of achievement, roles, and experiences. The promotion of policies favouring work/family balance by corporations (e.g., family leaves (Albiston 2010)), which acknowledges our roles as breadwinners/professionals and as family members, is a powerful example of how pluralities of criteria can become institutionalized.

Ordinary Universalism. This response valorises types of worth and behaviours that can be achieved by all, because they are not resource-dependent. It centers on what people believe all human beings have in common and thus what makes people equal (or compatible or similar (Lamont et al 2002)): shared biology, 'human nature', cosmological insignificance, or the belief that we are all 'children of God'. This can be contrasted with ideologies of equality based on merit, efforts, or standardized aptitude test scores.

Destigmatizing the stigmatized. This response consists of broadening inclusion by attacking directly the stigma attached to specific groups. I draw on a study of the process by which particular groups (people living with HIV-AIDS, African Americans, and people labelled

as obese) demonstrate the importance of removing blame in order to refute the notion that a specific group deserves their lot because of their behaviour (e.g. the high level of poverty among African Americans) (Clair et al 2016).

These three responses can function as narratives of hope because they enable new types of relationships between groups and set symbolic conditions for transforming social boundaries—as they manifest themselves in patterns of intermarriage, friendships, and residential segregation (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Such changes should complement other approaches to overcoming social divisions, such as deliberation and the broadening of networks (Sunstein 2017) or the adoption of multicultural policies.[42]

These responses are 'possibilist' (to borrow a term from Albert Hirschman's classic book *A Bias for Hope* (1971)): they are expressions of expectations for a better future grounded in greater solidarity, inclusiveness, and diversity. They involve evaluation and moral orientations that can have direct impact on future behaviour (Frye 2012).[43] As such, they are ideas about 'imagined futures' (Mische 2009: 702) or alternative ways of visualizing and conceptualizing what has yet to happen. As they circulate and become more widely shared, such responses have the potential to foster predictable behaviours (Beckert and Bronk 2018; Nowotny 2016).

But of course, messages are only half of the equation. In order to feed our social imaginaries, [44] they need to be diffused and gain legitimacy. As important as messages are, their '*medium' or pathways of* diffusion of the messages are equally important. To understand what may be an effective approach to the diffusion of messages, one needs to draw on research in the fields of communication, cultural sociology and social movements to capture how messages travel.

Institutions, such as universities, corporations, and the media, play a crucial role as 'engines of hope' by pushing implicit or explicit messages of inclusion into our social

imaginaries. For instance, universities provide support to the consolidation of alternative identities (for instance, for ethnic and racial minorities and LGBTQs) (Carrey, Clayton and Horiuchi 2019; Meyer 2010; Berrey 2015; and Warikoo 2016). Human relations departments in corporations have standardised the rights of various categories of workers (Dobbin 2009; Meyer 2010). Sports and entertainment industries are public settings where stigmatized groups denounce unfair treatment. This was the case when National Football League players 'took a knee' in 2017 to denounce racism (Lamont 2017)) and prominent women in the film industry used their fame to bring attention to the #MeToo campaign. The cultural dynamics that unleashed these and other organizations *qua* "engines of hope" need to be systematically traced and interconnected for a detailed empirical understanding of cultural change.

Promoting a plurality of criteria of evaluation

While neoliberal scripts of the self foster a single hierarchy of "losers" and "winners" organized around a single dimension or set of converging criteria (the rich or the poor, the credentialed or the unschooled, the prestigious or the low status), promoting a plurality of criteria opens up the possible that many are simultaneously defined as worthy based on a diversity of criteria (financial success, morality, and education for instance) (Stark 2009; Lamont 2012). This response involves valorising social contributions that are not directly tied to production and consumption, such as caring, educating, consecrating, and other types of activities, without subordinating them or justifying them by profit maximization. It also involves raising the prominence of a wide set of social roles, such as those of parents, friends, community members, educators, spiritual leaders, and more.

This response has the potential to lower the pressure to achieve on the upper-middle class and its off-springs, which could translate into less stressful lives and better subjective well-being.

It could encourage them to put more weight on criteria of worth that are not strictly correlated with material resources (although they are somewhat dependent on them), such as the pursuit of passions, the openness to deepening personal relationship, the capacity to explore to a variety of human experiences, and the development of non-instrumental pursuits.

This response could have an impact on the well-being of workers: if income is given less centrality in defining 'who matters', those who have fewer resources may be able to develop a sense of worth that is stronger because less dependent on material goods and more multidimensional. This would be the case if more emphasis is put on moral traits, such as demonstrating solidarity and dignity. For such changes to take place, historically contingent cultural repertoire (religious, humanitarian and others) as well as networks of significant others would have to support to new definitions of worth (Haller and Woelfel 1972; Small 2018).

While giving more weight to alternative standards (whether moral, critical, educational, aesthetic, spiritual, communitarian, or other) does not make insecurity and material constraints disappear, it can diminish their salience and impact on well-being. For instance, it can facilitate maintaining dignity, which has been shown to have a direct impact on subjective well-being (Holman and Miranda 2017). Alternative standards explain how 'quality of life' can be understood and experienced strikingly differently across social contexts (as shown for instance, in Singh's (2015) surprising study of the life of laborers living in extreme poverty in Rajasthan, India).

A plurality of criteria of worth may already be gaining prominence in the definition of the American dream preferred by younger generations, who put "the pursuit of passion" above material considerations. Belief in the American dream is slightly lower among younger Americans. In a 2018 national survey, 57% of millennial and Gen X respondents answered that they believe in the attainability of the American dream, compared to 62% of baby boomers.

These groups have different interpretations of what the American Dream is about: the younger generations favour less materialistic and more experiential definitions of the American dreams than the older cohort.[45]

Other recent surveys show that many millennials are developing frames of evaluation of their lives that are veering away from consumption, materialism and the American dream. In particular, Glanzer, Hill, and Johnson (2017) conducted a nationally-representative survey of college students for which they interviewed 110 college students from 10 colleges and universities of various ranks and characteristics (private versus public, religious versus secular, etc.). They asked students to agree or disagree that some factors gave them purpose in their lives. More than 50 percent of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea that making money is their ultimate purpose—which received the least amount of support compared to other purposes in life. In contrast, 81 percent of students strongly agreed that being happy is one of the purposes driving their life and 66 percent chose 'living life to the fullest'. Millennials prioritized self-oriented as well as relational goals oriented toward building meaningful connections with people in their lives. Their reactions may indicate that promoting a plurality of criteria of worth is urgent in the present juncture. However, these orientations could also be explained away as an effect of youth or by the transition to post-materialist values (see Norris an Inglehart (2019) for a recent iteration of the argument).

Moreover, institutionalizing a diversity of criteria is essential to reinforce their impact and legitimacy. For instance, in the contemporary United States, employers who support work/family balance promote care work as an important form of social contribution (and Moen et al. 2013 show that such changes promote better well-being for workers). In France, the subterranean influence of the Catholic tradition, together with unions and left-wing parties and social movements, played a central role in raising the salience of solidarity in working-class

culture as compared to the United States where these institutions were weaker (Lamont 2000). For their part, Larsen and Dejgaard (2013) associate the more positive view of the poor in Denmark and Sweden as compared to the UK and the US to welfare regime (liberal versus social democratic). Future research should focus on such institutionalization processes, and I propose how to pursue such an agenda in the conclusion.

Ordinary universalism

A second approach to promoting social inclusion consists in valorising what is common—types of worth that are accessible to all, independent of resources. This is what I call 'ordinary universalism', and it centres on what people believe all human beings have in common and what makes people equal—shared biology, 'human nature', cosmological insignificance, or the belief that we are all 'children of God'.

When researching *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont 2000), I conducted interviews with randomly sampled North African immigrants in Paris, most of them blue-collar workers to study inductively 'what makes people equal?' In their answers, interviewees pointed to evidence of similarity or compatibility found in our shared biology ('we all spend nine months in our mother's womb and have ten fingers'), our shared human nature ('there are good and bad people in all races'), our shared needs ('we all get up in the morning to buy our bread at the baker'), and our shared cosmological insignificance or the fact that we are 'children of God' (Lamont, Morning and Mooney 2002). Interviewees did not draw on the precepts of liberal theory concerning formal equality, but instead used metaphors gleaned from their everyday life observations, interactions, and experiences. By doing so, they imagined 'moral circles' organized around similarities (Graham et al. (2016) suggest that people feel empathy for those they share

similarities with). Finding similarities encourages solidarity among members of various stigmatized groups (Richeson 2016).

The importance of focusing on what is in common is also emphasized by recent research on political attitudes: social psychologists Feinberg and Willer (2015) argue that forcing Republicans and Democrats, or conservatives and progressives, to converge around a single set position is doomed to failure: it encourages opponents to stay on their position and to impose their views on others. It is more productive to engage in 'moral reframing', which consists of making commonalities, instead of differences, salient. This suggests the importance of promoting a plurality of universalistic criteria of worth that anyone can meet, as described above. 'Ordinary universalism' captures such commonalities, and it may require creating opportunities for face-to-face encounters and for more frequent intergroup contacts (Mutz 2006).

Little is known about how we understand what brings us together as human beings, which is particularly needed in these times of social polarization. For social scientists, a first step will be to improve our empirical understanding of how ordinary people understand our similarities and differences, using inductive and survey methods. A second step will be to consider how to reinforce cultural messages that contribute to social inclusion. Social scientists have considerably expanded their realm of activities by advising politicians and policy makers on how to maximize their impact in engineering society. Again, much of the focus has been on the distribution of resources and the alleviation of inequality and poverty. It is high time that we give stigmatization and social inclusion their due.

The promotion of ordinary universalism does not require downplaying the claims of stigmatized groups in favour of what is common. In fact, acknowledging their experience of injustice and working toward their destigmatization is essential to broadening cultural membership and to limiting the possibility that new forms of inequality emerge from the

promotion of ordinary universalism. Social psychological approaches that regard tribalism as a fundamental characteristic of human nature (e.g., Green 2013) are not equipped to understand variations in groupness and in the permeability and properties of group boundaries.

Destigmatization

The third response for promoting inclusion focuses on the destigmatization of stigmatized groups. Changing the frames through which such groups are perceived is crucial to a broadening of cultural membership. What is at stake here is not to raise awareness about implicit racism for the majority group, but to transform how groups are framed.[46]

In a recent study, colleagues and I examined destigmatization processes through the comparison of three groups that have experienced different degrees of destigmatization over the last several decades (Clair, Daniel and Lamont 2016). We compared people living with HIV/AIDS, the most successful case of destigmatization (as measured by changes in attitudinal scales); African Americans, a group that saw mixed results; and the case of people labelled as obese, among whom efforts to destigmatize have had limited success (Saguy 2012). We drew on the secondary literature on these cases to trace the process by which destigmatization occurred (or not). We focused on identifying social actors central in these processes, the cultural repertoires and other resources they drew on, and the destigmatization actions they engaged in.

Our analysis considered how to improve public attitudes toward stigmatized groups and how to increase inclusionary policies and practices that could afford them greater cultural membership. Drawing on social psychological insights, we considered each group's successes or failures in removing blame and drawing equivalences between their groups and various outgroups. We pointed to three important steps to achieve these objectives: 1) Improve beliefs and attitudes through institutions and informal interactions; 2) Provide positive constructions of

groups and behaviours among stigmatizers; and 3) Provide support for laws and policies that incorporate groups.

We identified a causal pathway that connects key social actors, which include knowledge workers such as medical experts, legal experts, and cultural intermediaries such as journalists. Also crucial are social movement leaders and social movement actors. Together, they draw on cultural resources available in the environment, such as existing ideologies pertaining to equality, rights, and multiculturalism, to promote the groups they are concerned with. They do so by engaging in a number of destigmatizing actions, such as developing and disseminating non-blameworthy claims about the etiology of the group's disadvantage (Clair, Daniel and Lamont 2016: 230). This involves using the law to promoting equal and human rights (Rosenberg 1991; Epp 1998).

For the new meanings to be adopted, several conditions need to be met: 1) The knowledge produced by experts has to be credible and conclusive. This is the case for instance when medical researchers were able to show that HIV/AIDS is a condition that can affect anyone, demonstrating the potential for linked fate (one of several general conditions for destigmatization); 2) This frame also partly dissociated the disease from allegedly sexually promiscuous (and thus blameworthy) gay men; 3)The diffusion of such claims was facilitated when high status actors, such as the basketball player Magic Johnson, went public as someone having the virus. Such a framing of the condition facilitated its destigmatization as it was compatible with existing ideologies, such as the increasingly popular rights-based claims used by other minority groups (Skrentny 2009).

This analysis conceptualizes the causal chain as a historical process of cultural change that occurs in a three-dimensional social space (involving groups located in time and space). This

chain connects not only knowledge claims about how HIV/AIDS is transmitted, but also the relative prestige and resources of the experts and their channels and networks of diffusion.

From the conclusions drawn on the basis of these cases, it may be possible to consider other stigmatized groups in order to generalize about how destigmatization processes operate. While the collaboration of knowledge workers, cultural intermediaries, and social movements leaders and actors was essential for the destigmatization of people living with HIV/AIDS, the configuration of agents is likely to vary across contexts. Understanding how the meanings associated with stigmatized groups have been effectively challenged is a major step toward greater social inclusion.

1) Conclusion: Obstacles and Future Agenda

I have laid out some of the challenges that result from the ravaging effects of neoliberalism and proposed a path forward for the broadening of cultural membership in the context of the current crisis faced by American society. I have emphasized the role of narratives and criteria of worth as means to address a small segment of the current challenges—the cultural crisis. The response I propose requires a pragmatic optimism that acknowledges the cultural challenges of the current political and economic moment, but also focuses on strategic openings.

These responses are only a few of the possible paths to cultural change. I have focused on individual scripts of self-worth, but many other types of cultural changes should be considered -- for instance, how faith-based communities or legal communities are promoting social justice; how corporate marketing contributes to destigmatization; and how television programming changes perceptions of groups (see for instance www.aptn.ca/firstcontact, which aimed to improve popular understanding of Indigenous communities in Canada). [47]

Moreover, while I have focused on responses, I have not discussed the various obstacles to social transformation, which include the following:

1) Destigmatization is not entirely in the hands of the stigmatized and their allies. Dominant groups play a central role in maintaining faith in the American dream, as this is the conditions for the reproduction of our economy. Countering this resistance may be a considerable challenge. Moreover, the destigmatization of one group may be perceived by the dominant group as their own group's demise, given that social position is defined in relation to one another (Bourdieu 1984) and that groups tend to defend their relative advantage and patrol boundaries (Tilly 1998). Obama's election was arguably a moment of broad-scale destigmatization of well-educated, affluent African Americans, but it was deeply resented by many Whites who perceived his presidency a threat to their sense of group positioning (Blumer 1958). The White backlash that followed brought Trump to power, with the consequences that we know. Thus we need to study destigmatization not only in terms of what happens to the stigmatized groups, but also from the perspective of the stigmatizers.
2) The current American political context heightens the deep salience of individualism as an American creed and competitiveness (which can so easily heighten boundaries and a sense of threat). This is particularly the case given the pervasive political use of stigmatization which is being mobilized by conservatives and populists against immigrants and others. Diffusing narratives of hope may be an uphill battle in such a context where cultural obstacles abound.
3) Hierarchies can easily take new forms, which is why we have to understand what conditions will change criteria and translate into less stigmatizing actions and policies. What can we do to ensure that new criteria of worth go hand in hand with new practices?

To fully understand these questions, future research should consider how new narratives operate in context (see Binder and Abel 2018 for an illustration).

This paper builds on my call to consider ' how inequalities in recognition and distribution mutually reinforce one another' (Lamont 2018). From our analysis of the case of people living with HIV/AIDS, we know that reframing their perceived identity requires bringing together cumulated medical and social science knowledge, social movements activists, and leaders as well as mobilizing the economic and organizational resources of the LGBTQ population. While new narratives are a *sine qua non*, cultural change does not occur in a vacuum.

Moving forward, it will be imperative to improve our understanding of how the public sphere is generated, which groups of cultural producers and intermediaries have the most influence, and how various types of messages (religious, political, market-based) are promoted and diffused. Such studies exist for some societies (e.g. Lei (2017) who documents the role of legal experts, information technology, and activists in shaping the public sphere in China). However, to my knowledge, a comprehensive analysis of how this happens in the United States has yet to produced, although important innovative studies are emerging (e.g. Hallett, Sauder and Stapleton 2019).

Addressing this gap would require bringing together conclusions from research on a range of disparate but interconnected topics, such as how the cultural background is constituted (Zerubavel 2018; Polletta and Callahan 2017); how cultural ideas gain resonance (McDowell, Bail and Tavory 2017; Schudson 1988); how elites shape public opinion (for instance, concerning policies about redistribution and solidarity (Heebling et al 2016); how social movements span boundaries to gain a following and mobilize (Wang et al. 2018); how social sciences ideas (e..g. "the second shift," "the overworked American" diffuse and come to define how we perceive reality (e.g. Hallett et al. 2019; Igo 2008; Zerubavel 2018); how medias and

journalism are structured by market forces and public and non-profit subsidies to in turn structure social and political debates; (Benson and Hallin 2007; Starr 2005); and how corporations, legal experts, activists, government bureaucrats, media executives, and cultural brokers transform conceptions of diversity (Dobbin 2009; Skrentny 2004), ethnicity (Mora 2014), nutrition (Gheihman 2019) and much more. It will also be imperative to consider how the public sphere is being restructured by information diffused via computational technology (Woolley and Howard 2017).

Finally, it will be imperative to study how social imaginaries are shaped by representations emerging both from the bottom up and top down processes of cultural diffusion: 1) at the macro level (e.g. political culture and national ideologies and identities produced by policy makers, politicians, and journalists (e.g. Anderson 1983)); 2) at the micro interactional level (e.g. responses to discrimination by members of stigmatized (e.g. Lamont et al. 2016);[48] and 3) at the meso level (e.g. messages produced by cultural intermediaries and knowledge workers, as well as institutions).[49] The increasingly insular socio-spatial (institutional) dimension that the rich and poor find themselves in, and how that isolation may perpetuate/reinforce such social imaginaries, that is, keep people from seeing the life lived across the income divide (Mijs 2018c). These levels do not have equal impact (for instance economic elites and organized business groups have more impact on policies than average citizens and mass-based interest groups (Gilens and Page 2018)).

While the United States has been at the center of my analysis, versions of the American dream travel to other countries – with for instance the Chinese leader Xi Jinping coming up with a emergence of a distinctive "China Dream" (Wasserstein 2015). While a hundred years ago immigrants came to the United States inspired by the American dream, today, around the world and in Europe in particular, a growing number of people appear to be defining their self-worth in

opposition to an American “way of life” that is perceived as unhealthy, and as socially and environmentally unsustainable. At a time when neoliberal scripts of self are diffusing worldwide, it will be important to consider the significance of such scripts for global inequality. This opens a whole new set of questions that are better left for another day.

[1] This address was delivered at the London School of Economics on October 25, 2018 and to various audiences whose comments and reactions helped me developed my argument: the Weatherhead Forum, Weatherhead Center for International Studies, Harvard University; the pro-seminar of the Department of African and African-American Studies, Harvard University; the 30th anniversary conference of the SCANCOR program, Stanford University; the 50th anniversary conference of the Université du Québec, Québec City; the 110th anniversary conference of the social sciences in Austria, University of Vienna; and the 2018 Annual Allen D. and Polly S. Grimshaw Lecture, Department of Sociology, Indiana University. The paper also benefitted from excellent comments by Asad Asad, Ellen Berrey, Amy Binder, Richard Butsch, Nicolas Dodier, Matthias Koenig, Ya-Wen Lei, Grace Meyer, Jonathan Mijs, and the members of the Successful Societies Program of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR). I wish to express my great appreciation the following Harvard graduate students for their priceless assistance with this project: Nino Cricco, Carolina Jimenez, Nicole Letourneau, Malaika Maka, and Madison Renner and Derek Robey. Warmest thanks also go to Lisa Albert and Kathleen Hoover for their technical assistance. I gratefully acknowledge the support of CIFAR and the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University.

[2] This paper builds on 'Addressing Recognition Gaps: Destigmatisation and the Reduction of Inequality', the presidential lecture I delivered to the American Sociological Association last year (Lamont 2018), which proposed to develop an 'empirical sociology of recognition and stigmatization processes' to broaden cultural membership. Cultural membership refers to the status of those who are collectively defined as valued members of a community (Edgell and Tranby 2010).

[3] Narratives are increasingly recognized across the social sciences as one of the forces driving action (even in economics (viz. Schiller 2017)). They set the terms for strategic action, mobilizing actors, and building solidarity (Polletta 2011), particularly when they appeal to emotions. As intersubjectively shared definitions of reality, they have the potential to lead to the objectification of world views and to their eventual institutionalization (Berger and Luckman 1964).

[4] Expanding from Honneth (2014: 329), I define recognition as 'the affirmation of positive qualities of human subjects and groups'. Stigmatization, a process that results in the mirror opposite of recognition, is understood (following Goffman (1963)) as a cultural process that consists in qualifying negatively identities and differences (Lamont et al. 2014).

[5] For a detailed discussion on how I understand the role of cultural processes in shaping inequality, see Lamont, Beljean, and Clair (2014). This paper approaches cultural processes, including stigmatization and evaluation, as two of many pathways (including social structural pathways) that feed inequality. Drawing on Lamont and Molnar (2002), it considers how symbolic boundaries are necessary but insufficient conditions for the creation of social boundaries which manifest themselves in spatial segregation and network homophily. The present paper discusses the transformation of symbolic boundaries, but does not tackle how it influences the transformation of social boundaries (patterns of social exclusion) due to space limitations. Nor does it discusses the relation between structure and culture. On this topic, see Lamont and Small (2008).

[6] According to a 2018 national survey, 59 per cent of young Americans, and 65 per cent of likely voters are more fearful than hopeful about the future of America (Institute of Politics 2018). On the high level of anger found in the United States today, see Duhigg (2018).

[7] My title is inspired by the book of philosopher Erich Fromm (1976), *To Have or to Be*?See also McLaughlin (1980); Marcel (1965).

[8] 'The reversal in the upward trend of life expectancy in the United States is alarming and almost unprecedented for a rich country in recent decades . . . The CDC counted 63,000 deaths from drug overdoses in 2016, marking an increase in the age-specific mortality rate from 6.1 per 100,000 in 1999 to 19.8 per 100,000 in 2016' (Flaskerud 2018). Also, The Economist (2018).

[9] While there is no universal definition of the upper-middle class, see Lamont (1992) for a justification of this definition. Many of the members who combine these educational and occupational statuses fall in the top quintile of the income distribution. Thus, I also refer to the upper-middle class as the upper-income group, following a 2018 Pew report (Kochhar 2018; Pew).

[10] 'Our principal concern is with well-being broadly defined and how it is secured by groups of people more or less bound together in an organization, class, racial group, community, or country. Accordingly, we use the term social resilience to denote an outcome in which the members of a group sustain their well-being in the face of challenges to it…. We define well-being broadly to include physical and psychological health, material sustenance, and the sense of dignity and belonging that comes with being a recognized member of the community… At issue is the capacity of individuals or groups to secure favorable outcomes (material, cultural, emotional) under new circumstances, and if need be, by new means'. (Hall and Lamont 2013: 13).

[11] These states have seen a reduction of 7 per cent of attempted suicides among public high school students between the age of 15 and 24. Same-sex marriage laws were not passed primary to provide gay people a message of acceptance; but were often justified by the need to treat LBGTQ cohabitants as married for all federal tax purposes (Fischer et al. 2018). Yet, such laws

may well have been interpreted by gay youth as destigmatizing, resulting in a decline in anomie and suicide attempts (Raifman et al. 2017).

[12] According to this author, national myths celebrate a nation by showing its unique qualities; strengthening it around major projects and ideals; shedding lights on the dangers it faces; and aiming to ensure its survival.

[13] I gratefully acknowledge that this comment is inspired by a discussion with my colleague Ya-Wen Lei.

[14] I share the view of the concept of neoliberalism formulated by Rodrik (2017) who states: "The term is used as a catchall for anything that smacks of deregulation, liberalization, privatization, or fiscal austerity. Today it is reviled routinely as a short-hand for the ideas and the practices that have produced growing economic insecurity and inequality, led to the loss of our political values and ideals, and even precipitated our current populist backlash… that neoliberalism is a slippery, shifting concept . . . does not mean that it is irrelevant or unreal. Who can deny that the world has experienced a decisive shift toward markets from the 1980s on?" Hall and Lamont (2013) acknowledge that many elements of neoliberalism are closely tied to the history of capitalism itself (Harvey 2005; Centeno and Cohen 2012).

[15] For convenience I focus on these dimensions only, although other aspects are discussed in the literature. For instance, McGuigan (2014) describe the neoliberal self as one characterized by entrepreneurship, individualism, and consumer sovereignty (also Adams et al 2018); Martin (2000) emphasizes 'new conceptions of 'fitness' that are aligned with changes in the kind of person and worker that is seen as desirable in today's rapidly changing and fiercely competitive corporate world—including 'continuous flexibility' (p. 136)'; Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) focus on the centrality of networking. Also, Demerath, (2009: 150). As noted by Matthias Koenig (personal communication), neoliberal scripts concern solidarity (and the absence thereof)

as much as the self. On the relationship between class and the self as understood by cultural sociologists, see Corse and Silva (2017).

[16] These traits were particularly salient when Trump performed as the entrepreneurial hero of the reality tv show "The Apprentice" (Keefe 2019). Trump also embraces a number of values that are not associated with neoliberalism, such as tribalism, aggressive masculinity, and nativism.

[17] Given space constrains, I do not discuss separately the middle and lower-middle class.

[18] These authors found that absolute mobility declined drastically across birth cohorts during this period, with averages decreasing from 92 per cent of children born in 1940 earning more than their parents at age 30, to 50 per cent of children born in 1984 earning more than their parents at the same age. The downward trend varied by subgroups, impacting the middle and upper classes to a greater degree (decline from 93 per cent to 45 per cent and from 88 per cent to 33 per cent, respectively) than the lower class (decline from 94 per cent to 70 per cent).

[19] 63 per cent answered positively to the question 'Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the opportunity for a person to get ahead by working hard/the way income and wealth are distributed in the U.S.?'; 32 per cent who answered said that they were dissatisfied. Being satisfied is more prevalent among Republicans (86 per cent) than among Democrats (50 per cent).

[20] 66 per cent agreed with the statement 'In America, anyone can get ahead if they work hard enough'.

[21] Two prominent survey-based studies provide consistent evidence: Bartels (2016) finds that more than three-quarters of the respondents to a 2004 national survey (the Maxwell Poll on Civic Engagement and Inequality) said that all or most people have an opportunity to succeed, and more than 85 per cent attribute inequality to some people not working as hard as others. For her part, McCall (2013) finds that 'the core American belief in bootstraps opportunity is…strongly supported' in the national survey data she analyses: since the late 1980s, the majority of survey

respondents report hard work as the most important reason that people get ahead. In a recent interview-based study of working-class people, Gest' (2016) finds they maintain strong faith in the American dream and tend to blame economic hardships on personal failings, rather than structural issues. Overall, 'most insist that the American Dream exists or that hard work pays off' (p. 155), even as their own hard work and that of their friends and families fails to relieve their financial precarity.

[22] Personal communication with the author. For the United States, about 86 per cent for adults who reached adulthood in the 1930s shared this belief, as compared to 96 percent of those who reached adulthood in the 2010s.

[23] These figures are somewhat different from those presented in Figure II. While results from the are many attitudinal surveys on this topic vary, I discuss what I perceive to be the dominant trends.

[24] Pew Research Center 2017; Wall Street Journal 1986; ISI Survey 1994, 1996; CNN Survey 2010.

[25] Only 37 per cent of respondents to the 2018 George Washington University Battleground Poll agreed that next generation will be better off economically than they are now, but 72 per cent agreed that they are optimistic about where they will be financially five years from now. Data compiled by the Enterprise Institute Report, using publicly available data from the Roper Center (Cornell University), cited by Bowman et al. (2013).

[26] Note however that the top income group is defined as making only 50 to 100K a year. Using this data, we document patterns across classes: 16 per cent of the latter said they will probably have fewer children than they hoped to have, compared to 25 per cent of those making under 50K.

[27] Concerted cultivation can be measured by 'measures of the organization of children's daily lives, use of language, and parental interventions with institutions'. Parents who practiced concerted cultivation aim to structure their children's time and to supply access to various experiences to afford children with training for school success (Cheadle 2008: 6).

[28] According to the Independent Educational Consultants Association, the use of independent educational consultants (IECs) doubled in number between 2003 and 2008 (Bick 2008). Parents hired IECs with the purpose of helping to manage the intense stress of the college application process (Sun & Smith 2017: 14; also Demerath 2009: chapter 2).

[29] Demerath (2009) administered a survey that asked students to rank the following influences in determining a person's future: individual effort, parents' background, social support, and quality of education. Effort was ranked at the top by 71.5 percent of students. (p. 93).

[30] In their meta-analysis of 164 samples including 41,641 American, Canadian, and British college students, Currin and Hill (2017) found significant birth cohort increases in self-oriented (10 per cent increase), socially prescribed (32 per cent increase), and other-oriented (16 per cent increase) perfectionism from 1989 to 2016. On this topic, see also Beljean (2019) and Illouz (2008) on how capitalism forms the self.

[31] These authors reported significant increases in mental health problems in the lowest annual household income group (less than $20,000) and in the highest annual household income group. These were the only 2 income groups with statistically significant increases when adjusting for demographic characteristics.

[32] Thal (2017) finds that geographic separation of the affluent leads to perceptions of the entire community based on their own neighbourhood. Their perceptions differ from those of the rest of their community, skewing more positive. Thus, problems facing the poor are underestimated by the wealthy, who have disproportionate influence in setting policy agendas.

[33] '*Entre soi'* is a French phrase meaning 'between us'. It refers to feelings of commonality and community within members of a particular sociodemographic groups. To the best of our knowledge, there is not an equivalent word in English to capture this feeling of community and shared understanding derived from similarity.

[34] For a comparative perspective, see the analysis of the upwardly mobile in France, India and the United State by Naudet (2018).

[35] Jackobsson and Stiernstedt (2018) find that only 9 per cent of people in their sample of television programs are working class, whereas middle-class individuals—particularly white-collar workers—are represented by 76 per cent of people on screen. Moreover, the upper and middle classes are more likely to be 'significant' in a program (to appear repeatedly and to play meaningful roles); they are three times more frequently speaking to people from lower social classes than the other way around; and to be presented as virtuous, to be described as having clear goals and aspirations, and to have intense and important social relationships.

[36] In his examination of public attitudes toward the Bush tax cuts, Bartels (2016) finds that, despite respondents' expectation that the rich would benefit most from the tax cuts and scepticism toward benefits to middle-class and poor families, a clear plurality of respondents favoured the tax cuts. In his examination of how voters responded in ways that either 'rewarded' or 'punished' political parties in United States presidential elections from 1952 through 2004, Bartels finds that low-income voters were particularly sensitive to high-income growth in their support of candidates. However, they were even more sensitive to it than high-income voters were, suggesting a sort of aspirational camaraderie that he refers to as 'their 'materialist dream' of economic solidarity with the upper class' (p. 125). Thus, Bartels' work suggests that, rather than forming boundaries against the upper class, middle- and low-income Americans align

themselves with upper-class interests. This finding converges with Lamont's study of the upper-middle class in Indianapolis and the New York suburbs (1992).

[37] While I have not conducted an analysis of changes in boundary work of American workers since the early nineties, I have co-authored such a study on French workers: Lamont and Duvoux (2014) found a convergence in patterns between American and French workers, as the latter now draw stronger boundaries toward the poor and Blacks then they did in the nineties. Also, more have internalized the notion of self-reliance than it was the case two decades ago. Stronger boundaries toward the poor have also appeared elsewhere in Western Europe, simultaneously with the diffusion of neoliberal policies (Mijs et al. 2016).

[38] Based on the cross-national International Social Survey Program data (ISSP), Bloemraad et al. (2019) identify three trends in attitudes toward the poor across European societies. 'First, there is relative stability in citizens' beliefs regarding the relative deservingness of the sick and elderly (ISSP 2018). Second, we find a decrease in sympathy for the unemployed: the ISSP data show a fairly consistent cross-national decline in support for the unemployed across the five waves (1985, 1990, 1996, 2006, and 2016) among 16 of the 24 countries in the survey over this period (see Table 4). And third, we see a greater likelihood to attribute societal success to hard work—i.e. to see inequality in terms of the accomplishment of deserving individuals, as opposed to more structural explanations (Mijs 2018).[38] The evidence thus remains incomplete, but it does appear that people in many Western countries are more likely to say that particular groups of low-income groups are responsible for their own fate, and so disavow obligations of solidarity towards them, than before.

[39] Among the other factors contributing to the hardening of boundaries are economic threat, status competition, and in some cases, physical proximity or distance, among others. A full discussion of factors contributing to stronger boundaries is beyond the purview of this article.

[40] Harvard School of Public Health (2017). This data is part of a series titled "Discrimination in America" which describes a national survey conducted for National Public Radio, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

[41] But note that attitudes toward LGBTQ are more mixed when respondents are asked whether people should use the bathroom of their birth gender or their gender identity. Attitudes are more negative (in decreasing order) among Republicans, conservatives, people who attend church weekly, men, and people between 50 to 64 of age. Those who are most supportive of choice are liberals, Democrats, people who attend church less often, and people 18 to 29, women, et cetera. Thus, although symbolic boundaries toward LGBTQ have weakened, this trend varies in intensity across segments of the population (McCarthy 2017).

[42] Banting and Kymlicka (2013) proposed the Multiculturalism Index to measure how inclusive societies are by focusing eight types of multicultural policies across 21 Western nations, thus signalling boundaries. Wright and Bloemraad (2012) showed that such programs lead immigrants to be more emotionally and cognitively engaged in their host society, and more likely to run for political offices.

[43] One can question whether these three examples are narratives to the extent that they cannot be closely construed as a plot or an 'account of a sequence of events' (Polletta 2013). One can argue that they operate as plots to the extent that they are folk theories about what kinds of values should guide our interactions with and appreciation for other human beings.

[44] Here I borrow from Charles Taylor (2004: 23): 'By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows,

the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.'

[45] 49 percent of millennials and 59 percent of Gen X indicate "retiring comfortably" as a key component of the American Dream as compared to 73 percent of baby boomers. Also, 47% of millennials, 29% of Gen X and 27% of baby boomers view "pursuing your passion" as a key component of the American dream (Bank of the West 2018).

[46] For a critique of the research on racism implicit associations, see Lamont et al (2017).

[47] Lakoff (2006) provides a number of suggestions on progressive cognitive and linguistic reframing. See also Wright (2010).

[48] Human beings give meaning to their everyday interactions. They form networks of influence that combine with more remote cultural messages (provided by cultural repertoires (Lamont and Thévenot 2000)) in shaping how they understand reality. These networks in turn are shaped by resources (economic, social, cultural, and institutional), spatial proximity, and segregation. Together, interactions and networks, as well as cultural repertoires, feed boundary work, intergroup attitudes, as well as groupness. Groupness in turn is shaped by social identity, symbolic boundaries (proximate shared meaning about groups, remote repertoires—transnational repertoires concerning human rights (e.g. Paschel 2016)), as well as social boundaries (patterns of association manifested in spatial segregation, homophily, etc.) (Lamont et al. 2016)

[49] Institutions contribute to defining community boundaries through census categories, taxation, spending, and various policies contain messages about deservingness, who is in and who is out, who should be contributing, and who gets what. These are expressions of relative group positioning and legitimacy, as well as of group boundaries. Within institutions, cultural intermediaries such as journalists, professors, religious leaders, media and entertainment specialists, and other creative and knowledge workers also contribute to the production and

diffusion of messages about collective identity, relative status and pecking order, and solidarity (Eyal and Buchholz 2010).

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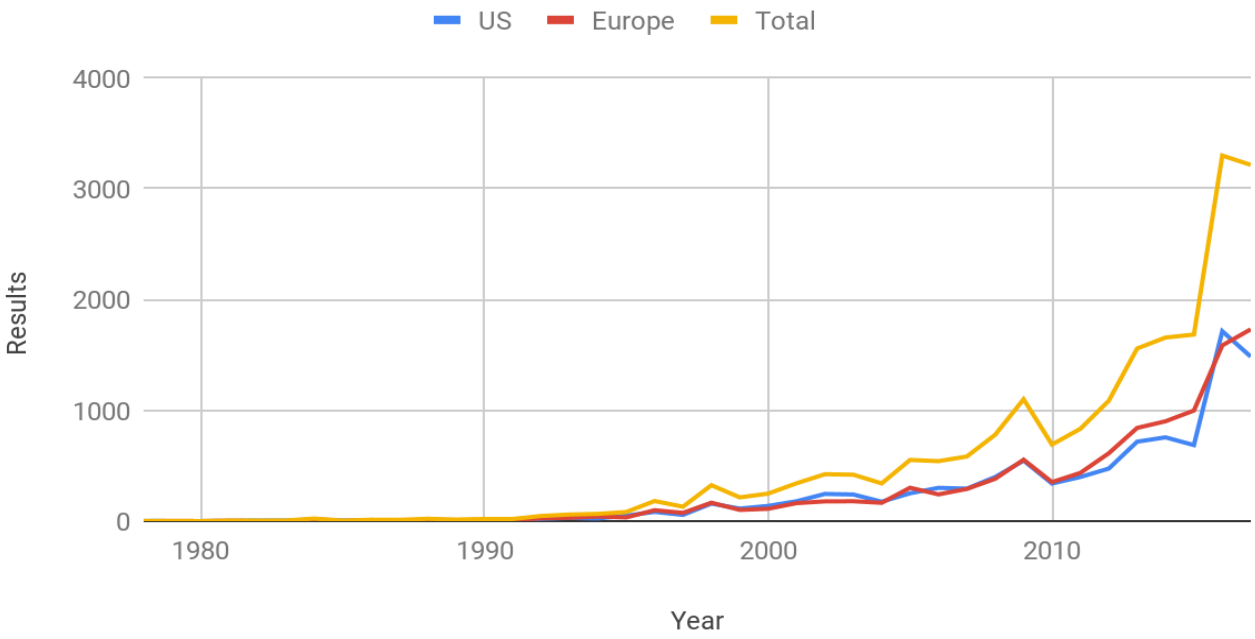
Figure I:

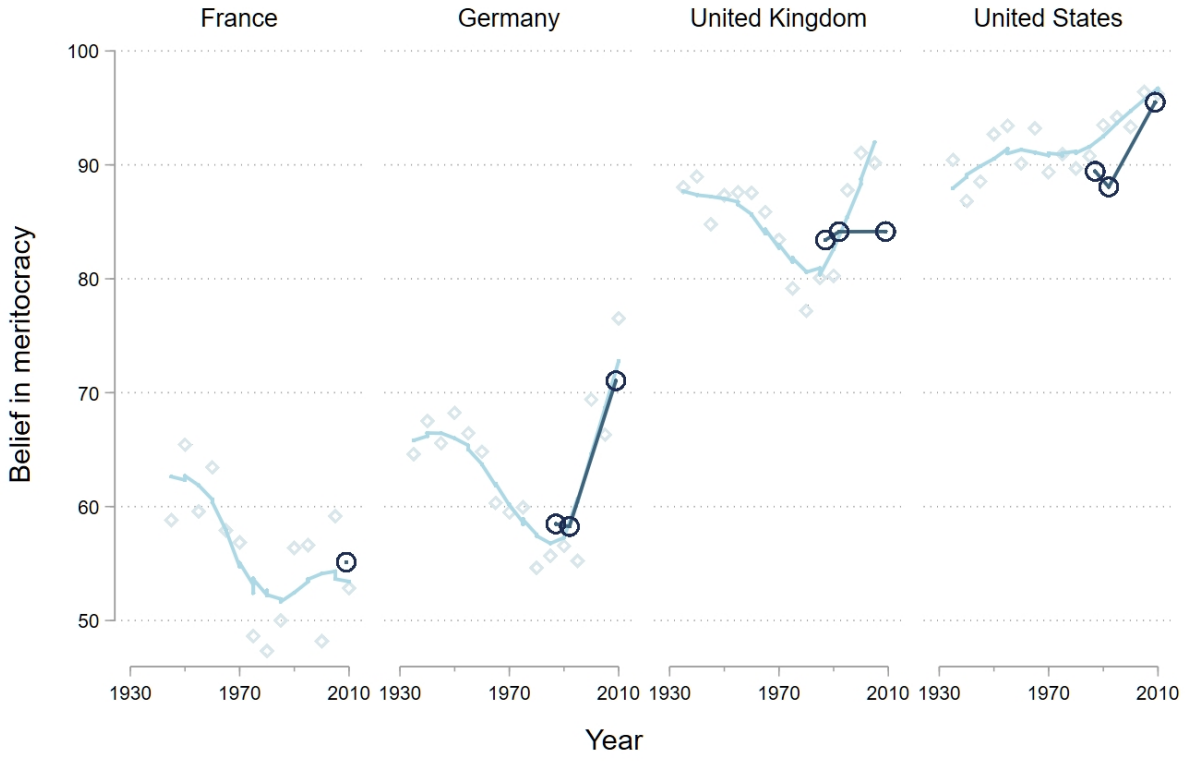
The use of the word ‘neoliberalism’ in the news



The graph shows the use of the word ‘neoliberalism’ in news stories and articles from 1980–2016. The blue (bottom in 2016) line displays Europe’s use of the word. The red (middle in 2016) line displays the United States’ use of the word. The yellow (top in 2016) line displays the total use of the word from all news sources around the world. Source: LexisNexis 2017.

Figure II:

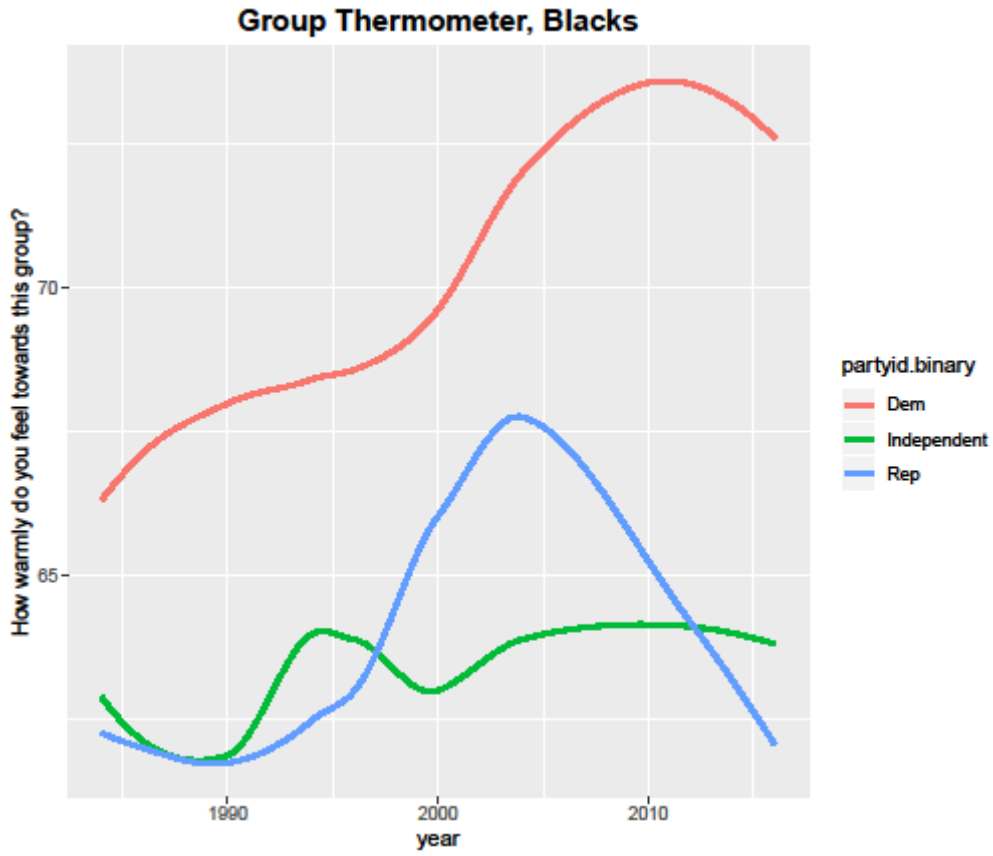
Percentage believing that ‘who gets ahead in society is decided by hard work’ for France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, 1930 to 2010*



*Mijs (2018a) based on ISSP 2014. The darker circles indicate popular beliefs as reported in the survey wave corresponding to the year indicated on the horizontal axis. The light lines represent popular beliefs for each 5-year cohort as indicated on the horizontal axis, based on locally weighted least-square regressions on cohort-country means (grey diamonds). The diamonds represent cohort values.

Figure III:

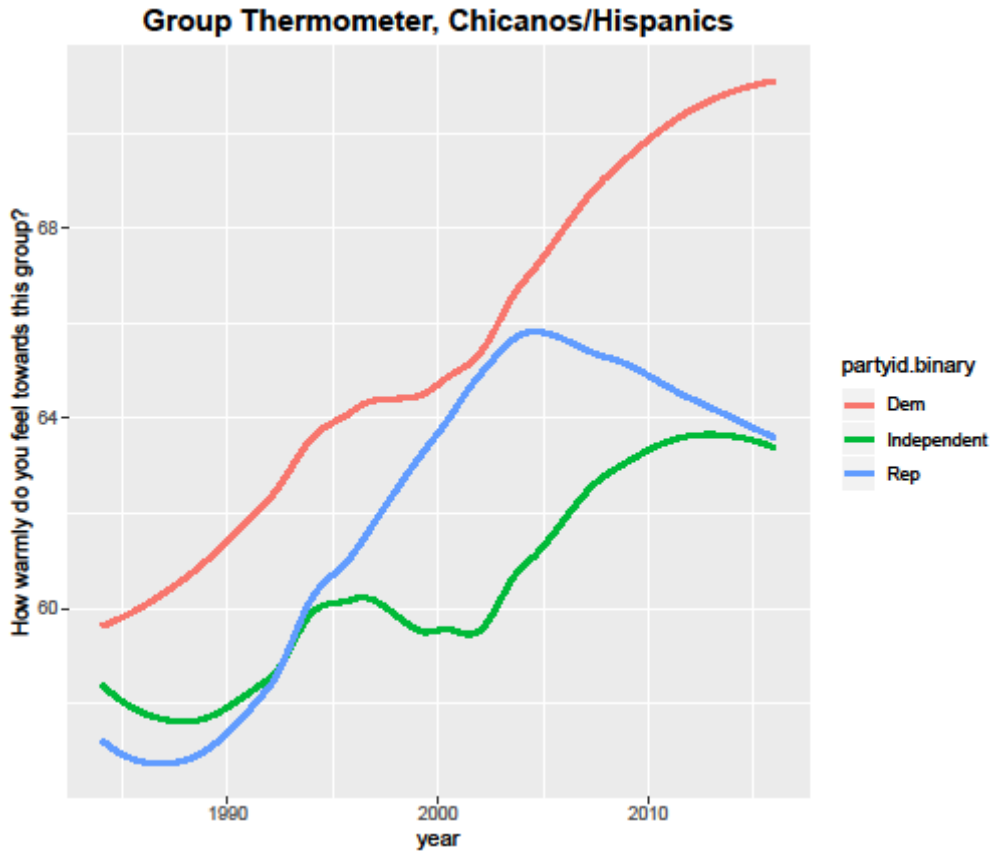
Attitudes on African Americans by political party from 1993–2016



The graph shows how warmly each US politically identified group feels toward African Americans from 1993–2016. The blue line (bottom in 2016) displays registered Republicans' warmth. The green line (middle in 2016) displays registered Independents' warmth. The red line (top in 2016) displays registered Democrats' warmth. Source: American National Election Studies 2017.

Figure IV:

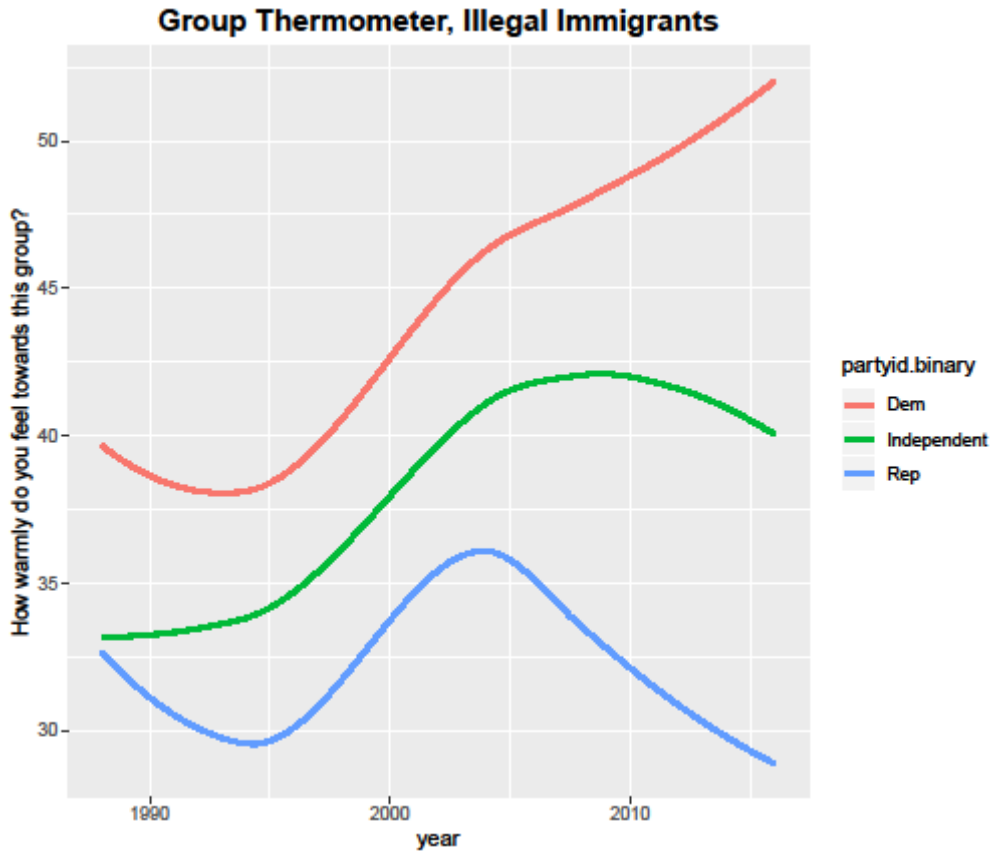
Attitudes on Hispanics by political party from 1993–2016



The graph shows how warmly each US politically identified group feels toward Hispanics from 1993–2016. The green line (bottom in 2016) displays registered Independents' warmth. The blue line (middle in 2016) displays registered Republicans' warmth. The red line (top in 2016) displays registered Democrats' warmth. Source: American National Election Studies 2017.

Figure V:

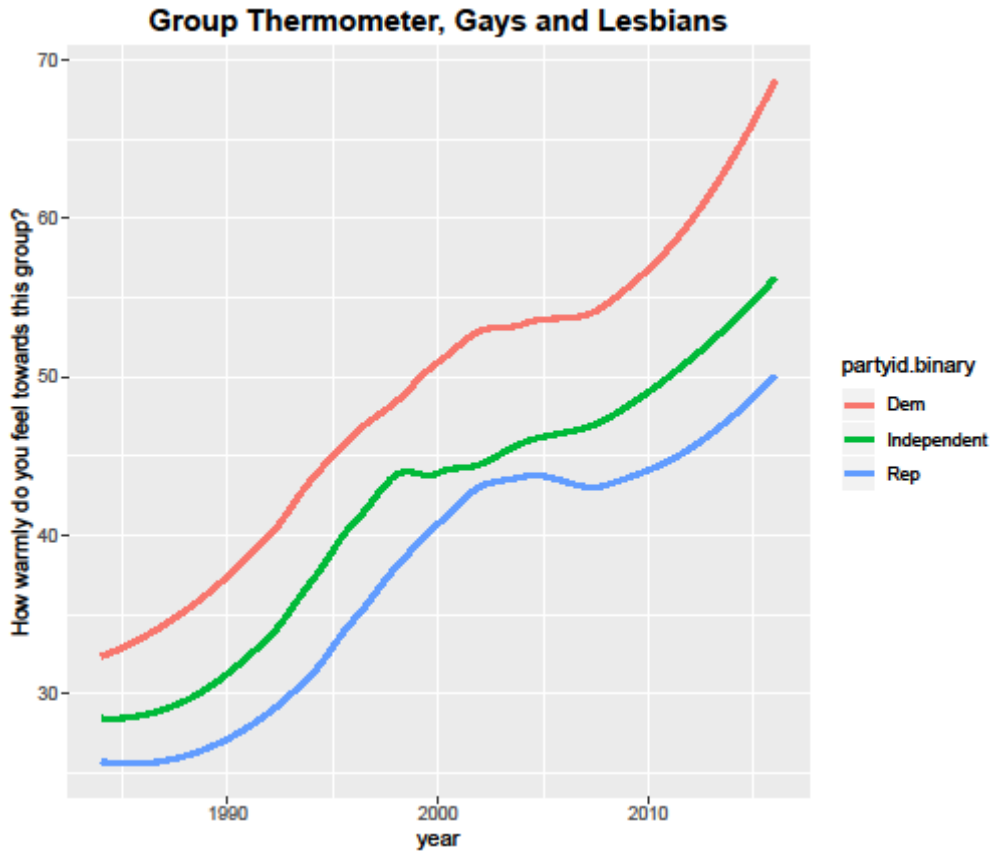
Attitudes on “illegal immigrants” by political party from 1993–2016



The graph shows how warmly each US politically identified group feels toward “illegal immigrants” from 1993–2016. The blue line (bottom in 2016) displays registered Republicans’ warmth. The green line (middle in 2016) displays registered Independents’ warmth. The red line (top in 2016) displays registered Democrats’ warmth. Source: American National Election Studies 2017.

Figure VI:

Attitudes on gay men and women by political party from 1993–2016



The graph shows how warmly each US politically identified group feels toward gay men and women from 1993–2016. The blue line (bottom in 2016) displays registered Republicans' warmth. The green line (middle in 2016) displays registered Independents' warmth. The red line (top in 2016) displays registered Democrats' warmth. Source: American National Election Studies 2017.