For a 'Sociology as a Team Sport'

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The intellectual community of sociologists exists through engagement and debate. I am grateful to seven generous colleagues from a range of backgrounds and standpoints for taking on the challenge of responding to my 2018 *British Journal of Sociology* Annual Lecture—Andrew Cherlin, Claude Fischer, Margaret Frye, Eva Illouz, Giselinde Kuipers, Mike Savage and Adia Wingfield. Each of their commentaries contributes to laying out a more comprehensive and multidimensional blueprint for the study of, and solutions to, the current challenges American society faces than the one I proposed. In this sense, they all contribute *de facto* to the kind of 'sociology as a team sport' proposed by Giselinde Kuipers in her essay (in reference to 'sociology as a combat sport' proposed by Pierre Bourdieu).[1] 'Sociology as a team sport' is one where our complementary strengths and areas of expertise define a vision for the path ahead—a program which I wholeheartedly embrace.

Each of these authors offer a slightly different take on my analysis, emphasizing the aspects that are closest to their own areas of interest and expertise (self-propulsion for Frye, emotions for Illouz, global inequality for Savage, Black Americans for Wingfield, the American character for Fischer and so forth). Considered together these responses resemble a Rorschach test—providing a fuller picture, fleshed out and amplified in complementary ways.

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[1] In the film *La Sociologie est un sport du combat* (Carles 2001), Bourdieu states: 'I often say sociology is a combat sport, a means of self-defense. Basically, you use it to defend yourself, without having the right to use it for unfair attacks.' Burawoy (2014) draws on Bourdieu's conception of sociology as a 'field of combat' (on academic, political and ideological terrains) to expand on his own vision for public sociology.

Each selective reading reverberates with its author's own personal trajectory in relation to the American Dream—perhaps more distant for the Europeans than the Americans, and for junior than for senior scholars, who may associate it with its promise of material prosperity their generation experienced and with the welcome it extended to the victims of persecution after World War II.

There are theoretical differences as well. While prior to the nineties it was usual to pit cultural and social structural determinants against one another, with the publication of crucial papers concerned with 'cultural structures' (e.g., the seminal piece by Sewell (1992) on 'the duality of structure'), a growing number of scholars found it more useful to consider how cultural and social structural factors combine to enable and constrain different causal processes and outcomes. This is in line with my own thinking about explanation and causality that connect explanandum and explanans through process tracing (e.g., Lamont, Beljean and Clair 2014; Lamont et al. 2016; Lamont and Pierson forthcoming). The essays that share this perspective do the most to extend my thinking further—without negating the centrality of distribution and economic scarcity in inequality underscored in my lecture (e.g., Lamont 2019, p. 2).

Toward a Sociology of the Public Domain

With these observations in mind, I firs respond to the scholars whose comments most aim to extend this perspective—implicitly or explicitly: Kuipers, Frye, Wingfield, Illouz and Cherlin.

Let's begin with Giselinde Kuipers (2019)'s essay, which focuses on the last part of my *BJS* lecture, where I discuss solutions to the current crisis by zooming in on the production of successful narratives of hope defined as 'consistent moral frameworks of social and personal worth with believable claims of universality that give hope to all'. A particularly broad comparative cultural sociologist, Kuipers invites us to consider in more detail: 1) what makes a narrative work; 2) how do social factors and structures support such a cultural narrative; and, 3) what is the scope of the agenda I propose and what to do with the question we cannot answer (p. x).

Embracing my project to study 'how failing cultural narratives contribute to social crisis', she suggests that we engage in 'reverse engineering', i.e. that we should look at powerful narratives from the past, figure out how they work and aim translate them into new contexts—for instance, consider how successful religious, humanistic and spiritual discourses offer a blueprint for how to create successful narratives in the future, with anchoring symbols and rituals and 'moral lessons to life-fostering identification and empathy' She proposes that many should be invited to the table if we are to understand successful discourses that populate the public domain. Our shared intellectual project 'requires the joining together of insights from different empirical studies and sociological subfields… [a] sociology [that] feels like a "team sport" rather than a "combat sport"' (p. x).

My essay primarily draws on the tools of American cultural, political and organizational sociology to consider the role of cultural intermediaries, knowledge workers, institutions, social movements and diffusion processes in the production of frames. Kuipers broadens this vision in

several directions. She suggests we should also draw on insights from psychologists of emotion, neuropsychologists and cultural sociologists to understand how identification, empathy and cultural resonance works (e.g., McDonnell et al. 2018); that understanding diffusion requires combining contributions from the 'sociology of religion, from anthropology to science studies, from advertising to media studies and media psychology, from management to global studies, from education to politics to social movements students'; and that democratic theory and political communication could help us comprehend the formation of the public domain, including the role played by rituals in forging communities and connecting people with a joint imaginary—essential to bringing emotions back and 'charging cultural narratives with positive or negative affect making them more salient and thus stronger'. As she puts it: 'Dreams require institutions to spread their stories, economic structures to reward virtue, rituals to affirm moral boundaries' (p. x). She also invites us to go beyond understanding what dynamics spread and sustain cultural narratives, to consider where the 'culture wars' or counter-responses come from—resistance to symbolic violence, 'civilizing offensives', and cultural imperialism.

Another commentator, Margaret Frye (2019) broadens the agenda even further:: Building on her remarkable work on imagined futures among young women (Frye 2012; 2019), she proposes that we focus on how 'cultural narratives of future success circulate in other international contexts'— in places like Uganda where unrealistic hopes are even more rampant than in the contemporary United States. Being pessimistic about the possible resonance of new narratives of hope in the context of an all-encompassing American materialism, she also offers that '[i]nstead of developing new narratives of hope, we need to reconfigure *how* people think about the *means* for reaching the American dream' (p. x). While decrying that most Americans have a 'false sense of

self-propulsion', she urges sociologists to document 'institutional weaknesses, social discrimination and the reproduction of inequality' as barriers to mobility that are not sufficiently recognized, with an eye for a 'more realistic understanding' of how divergent trajectories happen, or how extra-individual constraints operate. For Frye, American sociologists should "generate variations in means to realize upward trajectory" (p. x), that is, help Americans come to term with their limited agency as they embrace the American dream. Thus she proposes both a broadening of my a(with a focus on the global) as well as its narrowing (with a concern for means rather than ends). While sociologists know a lot about social determinants of success (the stumbling blocks in the road), we know far less about how to promote messages that correct the overly agentic view of American individualism. To address this imbalance, we need to better understand how the public domain is put together, along the lines sketched by Kuipers (2019), Lei (2017), and others.

Broadening in a different direction, Adie Wingfield (2019) whose important scholarship concerns African American professionals, considers the implications of my agenda for the study of race in the United States. She correctly points out that the analysis of destigmatization processes produced by my colleagues and I (Clair, Daniel and Lamont 2016; Lamont 2018) needs to more fully factor in the broad resistance of whites and their vested interest in reproducing their racial domination. She discusses reactions of whites that have contributed to the mitigated destigmatization of African Americans throughout the 20th century.

Moving forward, Wingfield urges sociologists to put more analytical weight on the 'possessive investment of whiteness' and on 'the ways whites deliberately and intentionally hoard the

privileges, power and status they derived from their position in the racial hierarchy.' I embrace her perspective. For instance, building on the concept of 'shared sense of group positioning' (Blumer 1958) *Getting Respect*: *Responding to Stigma and Discrimination in the United States, Brazil, and Israel* (Lamont et al. 2016) argues that we need to analyse variations in how much and how racial privilege is maintained, and to avoid papering over differences in how the process of racial domination is exercised across time and space. This is crucial if we are to continue to develop a sociology of racial domination that gets to the subtler mechanisms at work.

Wingfield proposes a final extension to the agenda I have sketched. After describing how some of the alternative narratives of hope I proposed may be unlikely to diffuse among African Americans, she points to others that have gained traction in this group. In particularly, she points to how the black men nurses she studied emphasized common humanity and the importance of caring for others, as they resisted racial harassment and exclusion (Wingfield 2010). Moreover, in her most recent work, black medical workers state that they value providing care in the underserved public sector hospitals because of their commitment to poor minority communities (Wingfield 2019). As she points out, these findings resonate with my description of blacks as valorising 'caring self' in opposition to 'disciplined self' of whites described in *The Dignity of Working Men* (2000). She concludes that my prescriptions for developing a plurality of self with a focus on caring and ordinary universalism may be more appropriate for some whites who have been resisting this repertoire of worth, than for the many African Americans who have already embraced it in response to their historical experience of subjugation. Her concluding remarks point to the need to promote different narratives of hope for different groups against the background of white resistance to social change; and this will prove to be particularly

challenging at a time when the United States is growing simultaneously both 'increasingly diverse and increasingly polarized'.

Also adding to the agenda, and converging with Kuipers in appealing to scholars to bridge boundaries, Eva Illouz (2019), a particularly imaginative sociologist of emotions, nods at the idea that we need to put more sociology at the heart of policy making: enabling more positive concepts of self-worth (a.k.a., destigmatizing) should also be part of the mission of policy makers. This broadened agenda would complement the role that is now played by psychologists, in advising policy makers captivated by the Happiness Industry (Davies 2015). Although Illouz has serious misgiving about the latter, is currently writing a critical essay on this very topic, and is questioning whether an increase in subjective well-being is an adequate response to inequality, she supports my proposal to broaden definitions of worth. She concludes that anger may be a more powerful engine of social change than hope (more on this below).

Finally, Andrew Cherlin, a distinguished demographer whose research focuses on the family and economic disparity, points out to how growing inequality is anchored in the changing workplace—due to the increasing influence of automation of production and computerization. He suggests that much of the alienation currently experienced by the working class should be directly linked to these transformations and that we need a visionary program to provide more people with 'meaningful work and meaningful sense of self' (a point Illouz also touches upon). He suggests that this will require rethinking educational and industrial policies and more generally, reconfiguring how work is organized. I agree that labour experts are among the knowledge experts who should also play a central role in defining the agenda moving forward.

Toward an Even Broader Agenda

In addition to the various perspectives offered by Kuipers, Frye, Wingfield, Illouz and Cherlin concerning the team work needed to reconfigure narratives of hope, how they work and how to better foster them, other commentaries suggest different paths for a shared research agenda moving forward.

A brilliant sociologist expert of inequality in the UK and globally, Mike Savage is sceptical of the potential for new narratives based on 'ordinary universalism' to have a sizable impact, based on the results of an interview-based study of 200 working class residents of Manchester he conducted in the late 1990s, where he saw workers point to their ordinariness to draw boundaries toward people above and below (Savage et al. 2001; Savage 2005). While his findings resonate with *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont 2000), there are differences. In this book, I also describe how in interviews thirty North African immigrants blue-collar workers living in Paris would ground their view on 'what makes people equal' in the fact that 'we are all children of God', 'there are good and bad people in all races', 'we all spend nine months in our mother's womb', and that we are all equally insignificant from a cosmological standpoint (see Lamont, Morning and Mooney 2002 for more details). These combined findings may suggest that ordinary universalism can operate as a classification system that enables inclusion, even as it is used at the same time for hierarchy-inducing boundary work. Future research should consider this possibility and study the relational and situational character of ordinary universalism to

better understand how it operates in shaping group boundaries toward inclusion *and* hierarchies (at the same time or consecutively).

This is in line with the suggestion made by Cherlin that we consider how ordinary universalism is more likely to be salient in periods where the economic situation of workers is more favourable and when ethnic competition is lower. Determinant of the porousness of group boundaries, and openness to ordinary universalism include intergroup contacts (see Paluck et al (2018) and Zhou et al (2018) for meta-studies) and the availability of cultural repertoires that feed or dampen competition. (e.g., Schudson 1989; Lamont and Thévenot 2000). A more exhaustive analysis of processes moving social and symbolic boundaries in one direction or another remains a project in the making, despite important contributions from authors focused on various types of boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Tilly 2004; Brubaker et al. 2004; Wimmer 2013; Lamont et al. 2016; Todd 2018; and more).

'It's the Economy Stupid' and other Points of Divergence

The most recurring criticism expressed by commentators concerns the place of economic inequality, or distribution of resources in my analysis. In my lecture, I explicitly state that I focus on recognition because it is a neglected aspect of inequality, and that my analysis is meant to '*complement the usual policy focus on the distribution of material resources'* (Lamont 2019, p. 2). I also point out that '*[t]he challenges we face are multidimensional—cultural and social structural at once—and that they should be tackled from various angles.*'

Despite the qualifications, commentators such as Savage (2019), Cherlin (2019) and Fischer (2019) take issue with my focus on recognition as a dimension of inequality, suggesting in turn that redistribution should take front seat if change is to be effected. In a particularly insightful essay, Savage argues that this is especially the case given the United States' dominant imperial position for a good part of the 20th century. He argues that growing economic inequality has become so exacerbated that it is now 'fundamental to the impasse in American society'— overdetermining the current situation perhaps more than it did in earlier decades (citing Bennett et al. 2009; Prieur and Savage 2013). While I agree with these important observations, to reiterate, I favour an analytical strategy that shed lights on inequality understood as a multidimensional phenomenon. This being said, I wish to bring a few clarifications on nuances between my position and the interpretation of it offered by Andrew Cherlin and Claude Fischer.

Andrew Cherlin suggests that my explanation of changes in the contemporary United States puts too much weight on neoliberalism and not enough on populism and technological changes, such as computerization and automation of production, that are transforming the experience of workers. I concur and would have addressed such factors if providing a full-fledge explanation of the changes I discuss had been my focus. Whether I exaggerate the harmful effects of neoliberalism on the lives of workers remains a contested point, which will require more empirical analysis—my impression is that evidence is mounting and tends to support the analysis I have offered. Whether neoliberalism has already reached its peak intriguing (as Cherlin proposes) is an intriguing idea which also deserves more analysis. Finally, while I propose that Trump combines many of the idealized neoliberal scripts of self (with a focus on

competitiveness, self-reliance and material success), I acknowledge that he is also a conservative opponent of neoliberalism—a particularly unique amalgam of various ideological strands.

Finally, and converging in some respect with Cherlin, the leading sociologist of networks Claude Fischer focuses on matters of cultural continuity and change, inspired by his own book, *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character* (2010). His commentary points to three points of disagreements: 'that neoliberalism has fostered ethnic hostility; that it has accentuated materialistic impulse; and that it has increased angst particularly among the upper-middle class'. He also discusses the centerality of self-reliance to the American national character.

Fischer's first criticism concerns the association between neoliberalism and ethnic hostility focuses on improvements over the last decades, In fact, the figures I present (pp. 19-21) concern explicitly the most recent years only. I do not deny the continuous weakening of group boundaries since World War II; the literature suggests that this point is beyond contest and I recently co-authored a paper on this very topic (Bloemraad, Kymlicka, Lamont, and Son Hing forthcoming).

Fischer's second criticism is that American materialism has been part of American capitalism all along and is not associated with neoliberalism. I acknowledge that materialism is inherent to American capitalism (see footnote 14, as well as Hall and Lamont (2013) where my approach to neoliberalism is elaborated and where its relationship to capitalism is briefly discussed). I believe this association has intensified with neoliberalism and the growing inequality of the recent years

but have not provided full evidence. I explicitly acknowledge that the meaning of the American Dream and associated attitudes (e.g., materialism) is quite unstable overtime and variable across groups (pp. 9-10).

Fischer's third criticism concerns his interpretation of the impact of neoliberalism on the upper-middle class. While I note one survey that suggests that the upper-middle class is experiencing more anxiety than other classes due to growing insecurity, my overall argument is that all classes suffer from increased market pressure (including the upper-middle class, which is rarely described as suffering from growing inequality). This is quite different than the view that the upper-middle class suffers more than other classes (the interpretation that both Fischer and Cherlin attribute to me).

As for the association of self-reliance with neoliberalism (also noted by Cherlin), Fischer argues that it has long a distinctive feature of the American character. Instead of insisting on cultural continuity as does Fischer, [2] I would point to a number of studies (including some I cite) that demonstrate that the 'privatization of risk' has been a pervasive concern of neoliberal governments across Europe (especially in the UK), and that it has gained particular salience over

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[2] Analysts of cultural continuity tend to define as ideal or 'typical' a specific moment in time, which they regard as determinative of future developments. This require arbitrating between representations of authenticity (often based on current national stereotypes). My preferred approach would be to compare specific aspects of national identity that are viewed as "authentic" or represented as ideal and typical by influential scholars and social actors, and to study through process tracing how they come to be viewed as predominant. In contrast to the "national character" tradition, Lamont and Thévenot (2000) proposed an approach to comparative sociology that consists in considering the relative salience and availability of various cultural repertoires in space, including across national spaces (see also the concept of "national cultural repertoires" developed in Lamont 1995).

the last decades. A widely resonant essay by Beck (1992) has made this point, as have also detailed empirical studies such as Duvoux (2009) concerning changing perceptions of the poor in France. Reaching a final diagnostic of this point may require a more extensive analysis of the available evidence than Fischer and I have been able to produce to date.

Before concluding, I return to Illouz, and welcome her criticisms of the happiness industry as the filter through which she analyses my contribution. I share with her the conviction that this new turn in the contemporary cultural moment is pernicious as it puts on the individual the onus for her subjective well-being at the time when so little is under her control (e.g., Davies 2015). However, unlike Illouz, I disentangle happiness and subjective well-being from materialism. These are often associated in the current literature. In fact, the link between subjective well-being and material prosperity is a topic of controversy between economists and other experts of the topic (Ngamaba et al. 2018 for a comprehensive review; on this topic, see also Hall and Lamont 2009). Nor do I embrace a focus on individual grit. In fact, the theme of social resilience as developed by the Successful Societies program, which I directed since 2002 with Peter Hall, and now with Paul Pierson (in 2018 and 2019), is diametrically opposed to the notion of individual resilience promoted by positive psychology -- our explicit focus is on the role of institutions and cultural repertoires in providing social scaffoldings or buffers that enables the development of capabilities (broadly defined). More specifically, we aim to identity the conditions for greater social resilience without embracing the tenets of neoliberalism. This is the gamble we made in our collective volume *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era* (Hall and Lamont 2013), on which my *BJS* lecture builds. The spirit of our intervention was less to prepare people to withstand the status quo than to figure out how to engineer institutions and cultural repertoires that may help

people develop their collective capabilities. Since Illouz' concerns overlap with Kuipers on this point, I acknowledge that more clarity would have been warranted in spelling out my argument.

Conclusion: Hope Makes the World Go Round, and it Requires Teamwork!

Responding to so many insightful and generous comments from leading American and European colleagues has given me the opportunity to collaboratively develop further the agenda I sketched in my lecture, to become aware of underdeveloped aspects of my arguments, and to clarify ambiguous points. I consider this exchange a real privilege, even in the face of disagreements, which are, after all, par of the course. I thank the *British Journal of Sociology*, and its remarkable co-editor Nigel Dodd in particular, for giving me this unique opportunity. I hope that the transatlantic conversation initiated here is only the beginning of an exchange to be deepened through teamwork. At this writing, as in the UK, Brexit is failing and the US is in the throes of Trumpian madness), these countries are facing what could very well be a perfect storm, which combines cultural, economic, social, and political challenges. Our communities of sociologists have no alternative but to raise up to the occasion together, with some hope to help citizens and policy makers face the winds.

Speaking of hope: Eva Illouz concludes her essay by warning us against developing new narratives of hope in the current moement. She reminds us that Donald Trump claimed to offer exactly that to the white workers who supported him in the 2016 American presidential elections – a delusion he has been feeding ever since. In my view, allowing conservative politicians to "capture" hope would be a last straw at this troubled juncture in American politics. Medical

anthropologists have shown how hope plays a central role in sustaining resilience, especially when intersubjectively shared with significant others (Eggerman and Panter-Bricks 2010). Better collective "imagined futures" make the world go round and fuel the energy of many who have little to live for. So does anger (Illouz's preferred response), but with perhaps less productive and more self-destructive outcomes. At stake is what content this hope will take, what l institutions and social actors will contribute to defining it, and how it will diffuse. Bringing an answer to these questions is certainly worthy of sociological teamwork, and worthy of a fight.

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