Message from the Chair

This latest edition of the OOW newsletter features a look back at our two virtual panels this winter/spring, as well as a brief look forward to the OOW-section sessions at the ASA annual meeting. We’re also working to finalize the details for the pre-conference workshop on Precarity and Promise in Platform Economies. We received a ton of outstanding submissions and are looking forward to a wonderful event in Philadelphia on Aug. 17. Stay tuned for all the details. And here, fresh from the polls, are the newly elected OOW section leaders:

Chair (chair elect for 2023-24):
Sarah Thébaud, University of California, Santa Barbara

Council members:
Laura B. Doering, University of Toronto
Aliya Rao, London School of Economics
How can the theory of intersectionality deepen our understanding of inequality in the workplace? This crucial question led me to bring together sociologists Koji Chavez, Ethel Mickey, Megan Tobias Neely, and Adia Harvey Wingfield in an OOW webinar series organized by Tim Bartley and Malissa Alinor. The timely topics covered by the panelists ranged from the intellectual, to the methodological, to the professional implications of studying work and organizations employing an intersectional framework. This February 3, 2023 webinar was the first of two organized by OOW for 2023. Of the 240 people who registered, over 150 attended.

When Malissa invited me to moderate the panel, I was thrilled because the important focus spoke to the pressing issues that drive my own research agenda on women of color in the high-tech industry. We met to discuss panelists and were lucky when everyone from our initial list said yes. Between late fall and early winter, I formulated questions to address the professional and the intellectual aspects of intersectionality. Malissa and I wanted to cover a broad range of cases, research methods, and career stages to provide a comprehensive portrait in an hour session.
Unfortunately, Oneya Okuwobi could not attend. We greatly missed her work on non-corporate organizations and look forward to her upcoming book, *Why Diversity Programs Fail: How Initiatives Fall Short in Achieving Racial Equity and What to Do About It*.

Of the five questions panelists were given to prepare to answer, we had enough time to cover three because of their rich responses. The first question asked each scholar to address the questions and frameworks that drive their research agendas. The second question centered on methods, and we closed with a question on professional challenges before opening up to great questions from an engaged audience (Thank you to all of you who joined us!).

The panelists’ responses addressed key themes and outlined the challenges many have in engaging this work. The panelists acknowledged how scholars in this area are closing the gaps between intersectionality research and work and organizations research—giving shoutouts to key leaders in these efforts such as Joya Misra, Melissa Wooten, Hannah Branch, and panelist Adia Wingfield.

In their responses, the panelists identified the underlying assumptions about the intersections of race, class, and gender that they grapple with in their work. One of the challenges named and shared was how to apply intersectionality, a structural framework for examining inequality, to the field of work and organizations without reproducing inequality. Both Ethel Mickey and Koji Chavez referred to the field of diversity management and how this links to intersectionality. Ethel stated that: “Organizations are emphasizing diversity and inclusion as these institutional values, but these solutions encourage women of all races to individually handle what are structural workplace inequalities These collective spaces, aim to advance and empower underrepresented workers [but] are inadvertently reinforcing these intersectional inequalities.” Koji, on the other hand, shared “I pull a lot from social psychological work on stereotypes, and how [racial and gender stereotypes] implicitly overlap in ways that produce intersectional outcomes.”

Among the challenges our panelists named included how to investigate whiteness without reifying how it is part of an ideal worker construct or the notion that whiteness is a credential; what gendered racism looks like in the logic of the new economy; and whose perspective/experiences to center in the research. Megan Tobias Neely shared that she “focuses on case studies of the working rich as a way to understand how elitism, whiteness, and masculinity are intertwined in terms of who becomes the beneficiaries of rising economic inequality.”

The data and design question allowed the panelists to address how they designed their projects from focusing on one group, like Black male professionals in Adia Wingfield’s early research or predominantly white tech workers in Ethel Mickey’s research, or engaging in
comparative work. Ethel, in her discussion of small numbers of people of color (relative to white workers in professional organizational contexts), raised the following: “Can we think about the depth of small N's? The meaning-making that can happen? We know race, class, and gender vary by situation, by context, by organizational setting. So, rather than try to make our work seem generalizable or representative, can we value that texture?” Koji, the experimentalist on the panel, also discussed the challenges in design with intersectionality, as a theoretical explanatory tool, which is so big. There are only so many intersections one can design without muddling the explanatory power of the results.

Despite these theoretical and methodological challenges, Adia reflected on how much the field has grown since completing graduate school in the mid 2000s: “I think that the field has shifted and grown a lot of ways to where it's not something that gets met with blank stares in confusion. If you say that you want to use intersectionality as a theoretical and conceptual term isn't so shocking, and it's not so weird anymore.” Adia spoke to the broad and powerful impact the theory of intersectionality has had on the field and in practice over the past 30 years.

The audience questions covered topics such as investigating organizational boundaries through an intersectional lens to breaking up the common focus on race, class, and gender to examining other intersections, such as disability, sexuality, and age. The last audience question concerned impact. In her answer, Adia made a compelling case for the pressing need for public sociology and the importance of partnering with community organizations and other publics to make our work more accessible. I hope that her timely message inspires you in your own future research.

In an effort to extend her call, I have extended the list of citations Malissa Alinor sent the Monday after the webinar. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but a survey of key voices in the subfields that serve as a foundation for intersectionality and organizations research.

**INTERSECTIONALITY IN OOW**


**RACIALIZED WORK AND ORGS**


Bell, Joyce M. 2014. The Black power movement and American social work. Columbia University Press


GENDERED WORK AND ORGS


**INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY AND METHODS**

OOW Perspectives on the Climate Crisis

Simone Domingue, Louisiana State University
Tim Bartley, Washington University in St. Louis

How is climate change shaping the future of work? What kinds of organizational changes should we expect to see as climate change deepens? Why have sociologists so rarely taken climate change seriously? And what can perspectives that foreground organizations, occupations, and work offer to our understanding of climate change and its profound influence on societies around the world?

These are a few of the questions taken up at a virtual panel on OOW Perspectives on the Climate Crisis, held on March 3, 2023. The panel featured five outstanding scholars—Dana R. Fisher from the University of Maryland, Natasha Iskander from NYU, Jill Lindsey Harrison from the University of Colorado, J. Mijin Cha from UC-Santa Cruz, and Harland Prechel from Texas A&M University. The two of us (Simone Domingue and Tim Bartley) greatly enjoyed the chance to moderate the panel and have a wide-ranging discussion with this outstanding group.

Below are a few highlights. You can watch a video of the entire panel here.

On climate change, the energy transition, and the future of work:

The panelists offered insights on how climate change and transitions away from fossil fuels will influence work in the future.

“I don’t know if we have really grasped how much the future or work—how much occupations, how much society—will change in the next 10 to 20 to 30 years,” said Mijin. “If we think about how deeply embedded fossil fuels are in every aspect of our economy and our society—that level of disruption—I don’t think we have really grasped it.” She went on to highlight thorny questions regarding how energy transitions relate to justice for labor:

“What are the limits to justice? There are people who think that any kind of energy transition is unjust, regardless of mitigation factors. Who decides when the ends justify the means, and who is part of that conversation?”
Natasha highlighted heat as “the major occupational issue and threat going forward” and cautioned that as a society we are unprepared to restructure production and protect workers in the context of extreme temperatures.

“I think that the conversations about the future of work have assumed a kind of technological determinism that we haven’t really questioned—the idea that technology will replace human labor, and that this is inevitable and desirable in many respects without paying attention to the energy costs involved.” She went on to explain how “the number of jobs that will be created from policy interventions is substantial, and those jobs require relational and situational knowledge. We do not have that…and meanwhile we are spending 60 billion dollars a year to enforce immigration policy that makes it impossible for us to actually staff our energy transition.”

Why isn’t there more sociological and organizational research on climate change?

The panelists discussed factors structuring how sociologists, and critical social scientists more broadly, engage with climate change in their research. Dana started off this conversation with the following:

“Research around climate change has disproportionately gone to natural and atmospheric sciences rather than social sciences. To solve social problems, and understand social processes, we are going to have to think about how to encourage--if not demand-- a redistribution of resources to answer these questions.”

Jill followed by adding that it is equally important to understand how sociological work on climate change is (or is not) being supported and rewarded within institutions. She added that there are major biases against research with an environmental focus—and particularly qualitative and interpretive research-- within the broader discipline of sociology.

Harland’s comments focused on the theoretical frameworks that sociologists use, saying:

“For climate change, much of the issue is about power, and structure, and hierarchies. So, it seems to me that there are predominant frameworks [in organizational sociology] that exist, and they don’t lend themselves to answering some of these questions about climate change.”
Finally, offering a different angle, Natasha added: “all sociologists are worrying about climate change, but they just don’t know it yet…. I really cannot think of a sociological problem that is not a climate change problem now.”

What should OOW scholars be doing?

The panelists laid out an extensive agenda for scholars in the OOW section. On the topic an energy transition, Dana remarked that the idea of a just transition for labor is widely acknowledged yet not fully embraced. She contended that labor relations and civic groups will play a large role in facilitating a movement toward this transition, adding that this will be of interest to OOW scholars. Harland’s comments focused on financial aspects of a transition to renewables. He argued that the capital needed is largely there, but it is not being invested in climate mitigation and that improvements in renewable are lagging, adding that we need to understand why. He contrasted this to the massive profits realized by the oil and gas industry and shareholder gains in the past year.

Jill focused on the institutional actors, such as government agency staff and regulators, who will be central to enacting energy transitions, explaining: “One of the ways that members of this section can contribute is to identify how members of power wielding organizations understand what it means to do good work…What do they do when they get pressed to change those commitments by social movements?”

What makes you hopeful?

Finally, hosts asked the panelists to leave the audience with reasons to be hopeful. Here are their responses in brief:

“I think the call for climate jobs and justice is more accurately reflecting both the challenges of the climate crisis but also who needs to be engaged. And it breaks away from the idea that we just have to reduce emissions—it doesn’t really matter how.” (Mijin Cha)

“The IRA [Inflation Reduction Act] provides great opportunities but has to be approached with caution. There are many dimensions that have provided opportunities for corporations to hijack some of the central initiatives. The availability of those funds is crucially important to address climate change. This goes back to the capital issue…so that we are not solely dependent on corporate shifts in strategies.” (Harland Prechel)
“I actually am hopeful that young people who have gotten involved in the climate movement have started to turn to civil disobedience. Greta Thunberg just got arrested again because Germany is opening up more coal extraction…we should be hopeful about the coal transition [domestically] but still really concerned about it globally. (Dana R. Fisher)

“My students give me hope. They are so willing and eager to engage with the most critical scholarship I can round up for them…the idea that some of my most diverse students are interested in going into government makes me hopeful. Another thing that makes me hopeful is bureaucratic creativity—how people within power wielding institutions do work to change them from the inside out…They are engaging in all kinds of surreptitious, scrappy, crafty practices to make change happen.” (Jill Harrison)

“I don’t actually think there is a lot to be hopeful about, and I think it is important to face up to that…there is a sense here that looking for a silver lining we are missing a cloud, and the cloud is the really important piece here. That being said, I do think there is a part of the cloud that has been useful recently… Climate change will affect people, places, and structures that are powerful and that have seen themselves as sheltered from climate change. And I think that provides the basis for the kind of politics where you can build solidarity with actors who are enormously powerful.” (Natasha Iskander)

Further Reading


Announcements

- Small Grant Opportunity: CDFI Research Consortium
- Work and Occupations Symposium on the “New Labor Activism”
- Summer 2023 Gender, Professions, and Organizations Writing Workshop at ASA Annual Meeting

Latest from Work in Progress

- When medicine becomes a drug: treatment and punishment of prescription drug “abuse” by Michelle Smirnova
- How does race, gender, and sexuality shape the murder of transgender people in the United States by Laurel Westbrook
- A golden exploitation: money that the super-rich give to their domestic by Laurel Westbrook
- Why do economically marginalized Latinas go to college by Michelle Gomez Parra and Lorena Garcia
- Debt, discipline, and the future of strike activity by Giorgos Gouzoulis
- Resisting racializing surveillance through art by Torin Monahan
- “It’s the value that we bring.” How top income earners view inequality by Katharina Hecht

New Publications

- The Economic Sociology of Development by Andrew Schrank
- “A Theory of Despair Among U.S. College Students” by Joseph C. Hermanowicz in Current

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**OOW-Section Sessions at ASA 2023**

**Global and Transnational Organizations and Work**
Sat, August 19, 10:00 to 11:30am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 4, Franklin Hall 4
This session includes studies relating to the broad topic of global and transnational organizations and work.

Session Organizers:
Angelina Grigoryeva, University of Toronto; Yingyao Wang, University of Virginia

Individual Presentations:
“firma non grata? Firms’ Nazi Legacy and Present-day Foreign Location Choice,” by Kunyuan Qiao, Georgetown University; Jun Xia, The University of Texas at Dallas

“Forging a Global Labor Assembly Line: Deployment of Migrant Domestic Workers in Singapore and Indonesia,” by Andy Scott Chang, Singapore Management University

“How Regulatory Uncertainty Encourages Risky Entrepreneurial Behavior in an Authoritarian Context,” by Grace Tien, Northwestern University

“Processing Global Fads and Fashions: The Puzzle of Semi-Peripheral Upgrading,” by Alexander Hoppe, MPIfG

**Inequality at Work**
Sat, August 19, 2:00 to 3:30pm, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 4, Franklin Hall 4
Papers in this session offer creative and novel insights into the patterns and mechanisms of inequality experienced at work and when entering work organizations, speaking to topics such as racism and gender bias in on-the-job experiences, morality and cultural adaptation in career decisions, and gender and racial segregation across job titles.

Session Organizers:
Koji Chavez, Indiana University-Bloomington; Katherine Weissbraar, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

Individual Presentations:
“Getting Inside: Class and Racialized Disadvantage among Black Tech Entrepreneurs” by Alicia Sheares, University of California, Berkeley

“Introducing Excellence: Gender and the Introductions of Faculty Finalist Candidates in Engineering Job Talks” by Mary Blair-Loy, University of California-San Diego; Jordan
Packer; Olga V Mayorova, Department of Sociology, UC San Diego; Pamela Cosman, Department of Electronic and Computer Engineering, UC San Diego

“Job Search as Cultural Adaptation” by Yingjian Liang, Indiana University

“Job Title Segregation by Race and Gender” by Ananda Martin-Caughey, New York University

“Moral reconciling at career launch: The case of liberal prospective law school students” by Matthew Clair, Stanford University; Sophia Hunt

Transforming organizations: Macro and micro perspectives on how organizations facilitate change
Sat, August 19, 12:00 to 1:30pm, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 4, Franklin Hall 4

This session examines how conventional and less conventional organizations undertake change that could reshape the collective good. This selection of papers showcases how different methodological approaches, from ethnography to event history analysis, and theoretical orientations, such as resource partitioning and neoinstitutionalism, can analyze organizational efforts in large corporations, tech firms, worker cooperatives, and credit unions.

Session Organizers:
Katherine K. Chen, The City College of New York and the Graduate Center, The City University of New York (CUNY)

Individual Presentations:

“Competition, Legitimacy and Mergers: The Transformation of Credit Unions in an Era of Financial Consolidation” by Irem Inal

“From Climate Knowledge to Climate Action: Dynamic Normalization of Climate Information Platforms and Organizational Sustainability” by Janna Zou Huang, University of California - Berkeley

“Walking the Walk of Computing Ethics: Organizational Change and the Individualization of Risk Among Ethics Entrepreneurs” by Angèle Christin, Stanford University

“Worker Cooperatives and the Everyday: Identifying Transformative Possibilities and Practical Challenges” by Olutoyin Demuren
Unstable and Precarious Work
Fri, August 18, 8:00 to 9:30am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 4, Franklin Hall 4
This session draws together papers examining unstable and precarious work. The papers in this session use a range of methods to consider various dimensions of instability and precarity, including: how insecurity is conceptualised through a cross-national perspective, what constitutes an "essential" worker during the tumultuous pandemic, worker decisions to exercise voice or to exit a workplace, amongst others.

Session Organizer:
Ofer Sharone, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Individual Presentations:
“Coercion and Consent Among Work Visa Workers: Study of Indians in the US IT Sector” by Neha Jangeti, University of North Texas

“Configurations of Insecurity and Conceptualizations of Stability in the United States and Spain” by Elena Ayala-Hurtado, Harvard University

“Contestations over work time: meaning-making and social action in precarious work following pandemic-related shocks” by Ewa Protasiuk, Temple University

“Who and What is an “Essential Worker”? Variation and Ambiguity in Crisis Categories” by Joshua M. Hurwitz, Stanford University

“Workplace Relationships and Voice vs. Exit in Retail Jobs” by Adam D. Reich, Columbia University; Hana Shepherd, Rutgers University-New Brunswick

Boundaries and Tensions within and between Occupations
Sat, August 19, 8:00 to 9:30am, Marriott Philadelphia Downtown, Floor: Level 4, Franklin Hall 4
This session explores the topic of boundaries and tensions within and between occupations. Papers illuminating this theme include the following topics: negotiating and leveraging emotional tensions between professionals and clients in human-centered labor across a range of helping occupations in order to connect with clients; the lack of temporal boundaries in high-tech start-up work environments and professionals’ consequent consent to and burnout from extreme work hours; boundaries in working relations, aspirations, and resources in manager-manager-, manager-corporate, and worker-manager relations in fulfillment centers with different local managerial cultures; and the phenomenon of some modern occupational groups embracing multiple occupational identities at once, leading to occupational processes of stretching expertise versus stretching status and in turn generating more entrepreneurs and “hustlers” in the occupational structure. The set of occupations
studied in this session spans AI-driven and human labor, and historical and current occupational developments, allowing for rich, comparative, and generalizable insights.

Session Organizers:
Jennifer Lauren Nelson, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Kathleen Griesbach, University of Texas-Austin

Individual Presentations:
“How to Be a Human: Connective Labor as Artisanal Practice” by Allison Pugh, University of Virginia

“How to squeeze the lemon: Local managerial cultures as cause and cure of precarious work” by Alexander Kowalski, Cornell University

“Polyoccupationalism: Expertise Stretch and Status Stretch in the Postindustrial Era” by Leonie Henaut, CNRS SciencesPo

“To the Moon: Hype as Labor Control in a Silicon Valley Start-up” by Patrick Sheehan, University of Texas at Austin