Urban Social Processes Workshop

William James Hall, Room 450
33 Kirkland Street, Cambridge, MA 02138

Fall 2015 Schedule

All workshop meetings are held on the fourth floor of William James Hall in room #450 from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. on Thursdays unless otherwise noted.

Thursday, September 24th

Practice Job Talk by Jeremy Levine, Harvard University Department of Sociology, "Nonelected Neighborhood Representatives: Community-Based Organizations and the Political Representation of the Urban Poor"

Abstract: In an era of public-private partnerships, what role do nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) play in urban governance? Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Boston, this article presents a new conceptualization of CBOs' political role in disadvantaged neighborhoods: CBOs as nonelected neighborhood representatives. Over the course of four years, I followed nine CBOs in six Boston neighborhoods as they planned community development projects. The CBOs in my study superseded elected politicians as the legitimate representatives of poor urban neighborhoods. Private funders and government agencies legitimated CBOs' claims and treated them as the preferred representatives of neighborhoods' interests. Elected district representatives, by contrast, exhibited limited influence over resources and were rarely involved in community development decision-making. By reconsidering CBOs' political role in urban neighborhoods, this study uncovers a consequential realignment of urban political representation. It also identifies an important tradeoff between the urban poor’s access to resources and the ability to hold their leaders democratically accountable—a tradeoff that will remain so long as governments continue to rely on private actors in public governance.

Thursday, October 8th

Presentation by Weihua An, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Statistics at Indiana University Bloomington, "Context, Network, and Adolescent Perceived Safety" *

* Coauthored with Yue Yuan, Department of Criminal Justice, Indiana University

Abstract: Prior research has identified a list of individual attributes along with neighborhood, school, and network characteristics as potential factors affecting
adolescent risk perceptions. However, prior research has rarely investigated the effects of these factors on risk perceptions simultaneously. The current study uses the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (AddHealth) supplemented with the 1990 census data to examine the association between neighborhood, school, and network characteristics and perceived risk among adolescents. To account for the overlaps between school districts and neighborhoods, we use cross-classified multilevel models (CCMM). Our analyses lead to two main findings. First, risk perceptions seem to be context specific. Risk perception at school is mostly affected by school characteristics but not neighborhood characteristics. Risk perception at neighborhood is mostly affected by neighborhood characteristics but not school characteristics. Second, network characteristics matter for both risk perceptions, but probably more so for risk perception at school than at neighborhood. We also find that while more friends decrease risk perception, more friends with delinquent and violent behaviors increase risk perception.

Thursday, October 22nd

Andrew Abbott, University of Chicago Department of Sociology, "Inequality and Process"

Andrew Abbott will discuss his working paper, “Inequality and Process,” and engage with us in a conversation on the future of urban sociology. Dr. Abbott is the Gustavus F. and Ann M. Swift Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Sociology and the College at the University of Chicago and is the editor of the American Journal of Sociology. He is principally known for his ecological theories of occupations and the analysis of social sequence data. He is the author of six books, including The System of Professions (Chicago 1988), Department and Discipline: Chicago Sociology at 100 (Chicago 1999), and Time Matters (Chicago 2001).

* The working paper will be distributed on the workshop email list.

Thursday, November 5th

Informal Discussion Session: Growing Pains in the World’s Mega-Cities

Description: Cities are on the rise and with them the growth of "mega-cities," defined as physically and economically integrated metropolitan areas with 10 million or more inhabitants. In 1950, only New York-Newark and Tokyo qualified as mega-cities. However, the rapid urbanization and economic development of subsequent decades, particularly within the developing world, have vastly increased the number of these agglomerations and expanded their geographic distribution. By 2030, the number of mega-cities is expected to increase to 41, with the majority concentrated in Asia and Africa. Moreover, projections suggest that China, India, and Nigeria will account for 37 percent of all urban growth over the next 35 years. While this dramatic growth is largely driven by shifts in local economies and fertility rates, intentional state policies to stimulate economic growth and integrate public services have played a key role. The potential benefits generated by these urban structures are great, but so are the challenges they face.
challenges they face. We focus will our discussion first on China. In February 2015, President Xi announced his support for the integration of Beijing, Tianjin, and the rural province of Hebei. Following this state-sanctioned agglomeration, Northeast China will be home to Jing-Jin-Ji: the largest mega-city in the world with 130 million inhabitants, dwarfing all others, including Tokyo and its 38 million residents. What are the physical, economic, and social consequences of a rapidly growing mega-city, particularly in the developing world? How has the local government structure in China impacted the separation of land use that Jane Jacobs famously described as having the potential to "tear a city to tatters" in The Death and Life of Great American Cities?

Join us for a dynamic conversation, facilitated by both the readings below and videos we will watch as a group. Refreshments will be served.

Readings:

Thursday, December 3rd

* Please Note the Time Change: The Thursday, December 3rd meeting will take place from 2:30 - 4:00 p.m. in our usual room, William James Hall #450.

Presentation by Jonathan J.B. Mijs, Harvard University Department of Sociology, "Blurred Lines: Structure/Agency, Presence/Vacancy in Detroit’s Urban Museum"

Abstract: Detroit has come to symbolize the end of American hegemony in manufacturing. Faced with globalization, market competition, and political change, Detroit’s citizens seem the victims of structural forces beyond their control. Yet, my photographic essay explores Detroit precisely through the lens of agency, highlighting citizens’ creativity, entrepreneurship, and play. The photographs highlight the ways Detroit’s citizens have blurred the boundaries between ruins and art, presence and vacancy, and structure and agency. In this talk I will present my work and hope to discuss the role of photography in sociological inquiry.

Readings:

Presentation by Hope Harvey and Kelley Fong, Harvard University Department of Sociology, "Forever Homes and No Go Neighborhoods: How Housing Search Perceptions and Preferences Maintain Residential Segregation in American Cities"
* Coauthored with Kathryn Edin and Stefanie DeLuca, Johns Hopkins University
Department of Sociology

**Abstract:** How do demand-side factors contribute to the persistent racial and economic segregation of American neighborhoods? Drawing on 264 interviews with 156 low-income and middle-class parents, we show that the circumstances under which families make residential moves shape their approach to the housing search and the strategies they employ. While all parents want high-quality units and neighborhoods, they differ in their abilities to enact these preferences. Middle-class parents, generally engaged in non-urgent, proactive moves, search to find a home, neighborhood, and school that will fit their families' needs for years to come. Low-income families, frequently pushed out of their housing, focus on quickly finding a temporary safe haven, rather than a long-term home. Non-white parents' preferences for racially diverse neighborhoods also steer them towards less socioeconomically stable areas. These dual class and race processes lead low-income and non-white families to churn between lower-quality neighborhoods and contribute to economic and racial segregation.