

2024-2025 Research Apprenticeship Project List

Project 1

Mixed-Race Jokes on TikTok in a “Colorblind” Era

Mentor: Ayumi Matsuda

ASA Research Sections:

- **Communication**
- **Information Technologies & Media**
- **Sociology**
- **Culture**
- **Racial and Ethnic Minorities**

Apprentices Requested: **1**

Anticipated RA Commitment Time: **10-12 hours per week**

Project Description:

This project is part of my ongoing doctoral research studying the role of mixed-race humor in the construction and maintenance of racial boundaries in the United States.

The realm of humor is a rich field site where individuals can speak more freely about challenging topics such as sex, death, and race. Not only is it a space that allows for difficult truth-telling but historically humor has also been used to expose justice and oppression as it allows things like the ordinariness of racism and racial matters to be brought to the surface (Rossing 2014). According to Picca and Feagin (2007) who studied the racial beliefs of whites and the relationship between the “frontstage” and the “backstage”, found that whites “frequently present themselves as innocent of racism in the frontstage, indeed as ‘colorblind,’ even as they clearly show their racist framing of the world in their backstage comments, emotions, and actions” (41).

Unlike published joke books or conventional stand-up sets, anyone can make a TikTok in just a few minutes allowing for diverse data and stories. When mixed-race individuals share their personal experiences via TikTok, they highlight instances that usually occur in the backstage and thrust it to the frontstage forcing audiences to confront racial beliefs that might otherwise be overlooked.

Therefore, this project aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) What does the existence of mixed-race jokes and stereotypes tell us about racism in America?
- 2) What purpose do racist jokes about mixed-race people serve for racialized communities?
- 3) What effect do mixed-race jokes have on the identity creation of mixed-race people?

Project 2

Rethinking Wall Street Bets and the GameStop Short Squeeze of 2021

Mentor: Daniel Belback

ASA Research Sections:

- **Collective Behavior & Social Movements**
- **Communication**
- **Information Technologies & Media**
- **Culture**
- **Economic Sociology**
- **Political Sociology**

Apprentices Requested: **1**

Anticipated RA Commitment Time: **12 hours per week**

Project Description:

Introduction: The WallStreetBets (WSB) Short Squeeze on GameStop (GME) in 2021 represents a critical juncture in the intersection of financial markets, digital communities, and populist movements. While the event has been widely discussed in popular media, including films like *Dumb Money* and documentaries like *GameStop: Rise of the Players*, there remains a significant gap in academic literature, particularly from a cultural sociological perspective. This research proposes to analyze the GME Short Squeeze as a cultural phenomenon, exploring how it represents a “cultural splash” (Medvetz, 2023) and how the tension between autonomous spheres—such as Hedge Funds and day traders on Reddit’s WSB—can be examined through theories of field-specific logics and societalization.

Research Question:

How can the WallStreetBets Short Squeeze be understood as a rational, culturally driven social action within a specific field logic?

What are the implications of the event in terms of societal strain and the coalescence of outrage calling for civil repair and regulation in the financial industry?

Theoretical Framework: This proposal draws on two main theoretical frameworks to understand the significance of the WSB Short Squeeze:

Field Theory and Autonomy of Spheres: Using Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of social fields and capital, this study will explore how two distinct fields—Hedge Funds (Goliath) and WallStreetBets (David)—came into direct conflict over the practice of short selling. Hedge funds, with their vast economic and cultural capital, represent the professionalized, institutionally embedded field of financial elites. In contrast, WallStreetBets, an online community of amateur day traders, represents a populist movement that challenges the legitimacy and status of hedge funds, mocking their practices and successfully inverting power dynamics during the short squeeze. By applying Bourdieu’s idea of taste as a tool for maintaining power and prestige in the field, we can explore how the cultural capital of hedge funds was disrupted and redefined by WSB traders.

Societalization and Civil Repair: The societalization process, as articulated by Jeffrey Alexander, will be employed to investigate how the outrage generated by the perceived double standards of financial regulation (particularly hedge funds' autonomy from government intervention) led to calls for societal repair. This outrage, heightened by the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and the memory of the 2008 financial crisis, created a social strain in which hedge funds became symbolic targets for collective action across political ideologies. By merging the societalization framework with the autonomous spheres approach, this study will highlight how the WSB Short Squeeze functioned as a public demand for regulatory change in Wall Street practices.

Methodology: This research will utilize a mixed-method approach to examine the cultural and social significance of the WSB Short Squeeze:

Content Analysis: A content analysis of posts on the Reddit forum WallStreetBets will be conducted to explore how users framed their actions and motivations. This will involve examining language, symbols, and narratives that shaped the collective identity of the community and their opposition to hedge funds.

Media Analysis: The event's portrayal in popular media (films, documentaries, talk shows, news articles) will be analyzed to understand how the WSB Short Squeeze was culturally constructed and how it resonated with broader societal concerns about financial equity and regulation.

Interviews with Key Informants: Interviews will be conducted with financial analysts, Reddit moderators, and day traders who participated in the short squeeze to gain insights into the field-specific logics that guided their actions.

Documentary Review of Regulatory Responses: A review of legislative and regulatory responses following the GME Short Squeeze will provide a broader understanding of how the event influenced calls for civil repair and potential changes in financial regulation.

Significance of the Study: This research seeks to fill a notable gap in cultural sociology by offering a comprehensive analysis of the WallStreetBets Short Squeeze through the lenses of field theory and societalization. It will contribute to a broader understanding of how digital communities can disrupt established power structures, the role of cultural recognition in social movements, and the growing tensions between financial elites and populist movements in a neoliberal economy. Moreover, by examining the calls for regulation that emerged from this event, the study will shed light on the potential for civil repair in a society increasingly defined by economic inequality.

Expected Contributions:

Cultural Sociology: A new perspective on the cultural dynamics of online communities and their ability to challenge institutional authority.

Social Movement Theory: Insights into how digital movements can coalesce around economic and political grievances, potentially leading to regulatory change.

Economic Sociology: A deeper understanding of how field-specific logics guide the actions of financial elites and their challengers, offering a critique of the "irrationality" often attributed to movements like WSB.

Conclusion: The WallStreetBets Short Squeeze is more than just a financial anomaly; it is a rich cultural phenomenon that deserves sociological analysis. By applying field theory and societalization to this event, this research will offer a nuanced understanding of the intersection of finance, digital activism, and cultural

recognition, contributing to ongoing debates about economic inequality and the regulation of financial markets.

Project 3

Migrants, Migration Industry, and Online Spaces: Creating Migration Knowledge and Its Effects

Mentor: Dasom Lee

ASA Research Sections:

- **Asia and Asia American**
- **Communication**
- **Information Technologies & Media**
- **Global and Transnational Sociology**
- **Internal Migration**
- **Race**
- **Gender and Class**

Apprentices Requested: **3**

Anticipated RA Commitment Time: **12 hours per week**

Project Description:

This research builds up on my ongoing doctoral research on studying the role of migration industry actors in migrant incorporation before they arrive at their destination. This research will study how migrants, individuals in the host society who are in close relationships with the migrants such as families or employers, and migration industry actors share emotions and knowledge around migration preparation, navigating immigration restrictions, and their relative positionality on online spaces. The purpose of this research is to understand how the online space works as a place for creating alternative knowledge while possibly reproducing racialized notions around immigrants and destinations.

This project takes the case of Vietnam to other destination countries such as Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. Examples of the online spaces we will look at include Facebook groups for prospective student migrants, YouTube videos of marriage migrant brokers, and online communities of husbands of marriage migrants, etc.

Project 4

Media, Narratives, and Fact Construction in the Post-Truth Era

Mentor: Elena De Leo

ASA Research Sections:

- **Communication**
- **Information Technologies & Media**
- **Sociology**
- **Culture**
- **Political Sociology**
- **Science, Knowledge & Technology**

Apprentices Requested: **2**

Anticipated RA Commitment Time: **12 hours per week (flexible)**

Project Description:

While newspapers, magazines, radio, and television have historically served as the main media of the public sphere, social media platforms today offer new arenas for the formation of public opinion. Using data from social media platforms (e.g., X), newspapers, and other news media, this project analyzes the relationship between different arenas where facts are advanced by tracing narratives and the “story” of facts over time and across media.

Project 5

Becoming and Being Racialized: Racial Habitus and the Case of Academic Undermatching

Mentor: Erick Ramirez Manriquez

ASA Research Sections:

- **Culture**
- **Education**
- **Race, Gender and Class**
- **Racial and Ethnic Minorities**
- **Social Psychology**

Apprentices Requested: **1**

Anticipated RA Commitment Time: **10-12 hours per week**

Project Description:

Highly qualified Black and Latinx students often do not attend selective universities, a phenomenon known as undermatching, which is more common compared to White and Asian students.

While existing literature on undermatching identifies various factors, it often overlooks how students' choices are shaped by their proximity to whiteness. As an explanatory mixed-methods study, this dissertation uses Bonilla-Silva's tri-racial stratification thesis to explore how macro-level racialization influences micro-level decisions of students, particularly within three racial categories: Collective Blacks (e.g., Vietnamese-American, Filipino-American, Mexican-American, Black/African-American), Honorary Whites (e.g., Chinese-American, Korean-American, Cuban-American), and White students. Ultimately, this study will: 1) analyze the relationships between students' ethno-racial identities, their perceptions of merit, and college application preferences using survey-based quantitative data of community college students; 2) conduct interviews with students who exhibit strong ethno-racial identities to examine how racialized socialization influences their decision-making; and 3) evaluate whether students' proximity to whiteness shapes their experiences, thereby connecting racialization to academic choices.

Project 6

Youth Activism and Youth Identity in Neoliberal Societies

Mentor: Eunchong Cho

ASA Research Sections:

- **Asia and Asian America**
- **Children and Youth**
- **Collective Behavior & Social Movements**
- **Global and Transnational Sociology**
- **Political Sociology**

Apprentices Requested: **3**

Anticipated RA Commitment Time: **12 hours per week**

Project Description:

This project is part of my PhD dissertation, *A Generation in Search of Hope: Youth Movements and Youth Identity in Neoliberal South Korea*. It examines the emergence of "youth" as a significant political identity within neoliberal societies.

I have two primary focuses—one main project and one sub-project. My main work centers on South Korean youth movements after 2010. In South Korea, neoliberal policies introduced after the 1997 Asian financial crisis worsened housing and job insecurity for the 'Cheon-Nyeon' (millennial) youth demographic. In response, a diverse group of young people—both liberal and conservative—united to address their generation's specific challenges. Their efforts aimed to establish "youth" as a political category, actively engaging in the policymaking process, which led to the passage of the Framework Act on Youth in 2020. However, the institutionalization of youth identity became contentious, as some political actors sought to co-opt the movement for their own purposes, creating internal divisions.

This research constructs a chronological framework that examines both the structural conditions and subjective processes shaping the development of youth identity in South Korea. I have completed fieldwork, interviewing 60 key informants, including politicians and youth organizers. I anticipate that a research assistant (RA) will help organize and code these interviews, as well as assist with managing literature on youth activism.

As a sub-project, I aim to expand this analysis to the emergence of youth as a political identity in other neoliberal contexts. Together, we will collect, analyze, and create datasets related to youth in various countries, examining factors such as age range classifications, policy bills, employment rates, suicide rates, and birthrates over time. I am particularly interested in youth-related policies in developed countries, and I hope the RA can assist in analyzing these policies and the specific issues they address. While Korean language skills are highly preferred, non-Korean speakers are also welcome to join the project.

Project 7

Using Machine-learning and Discourse Analytics to suss out meaning structures in German newspaper articles on Willkommenskultur

Mentor: Min Ji Kim

ASA Research Sections:

- **Animals and Society**
- **Collective Behavior & Social Movements**
- **Communication**
- **Information Technologies & Media**
- **Sociology**
- **Culture**
- **Global and Transnational Sociology**
- **Human Rights**
- **International Migration**
- **Methodology**
- **Peace, War and Social Conflict**
- **Political Sociology**

Apprentices Requested: **1**

Anticipated RA Commitment Time: **5-10 hours per week**

Project Description:

I have a corpus of over 2,000 articles from German newspapers covering the reception of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees. With a previous RA, we modelled the semantic networks of the articles that covered the Syrian refugees and those that covered Ukrainian refugees.

The next phase of the project is to model the articles from the west of the country versus those from the east (or former East Germany). We may also employ cluster analysis and sentiment analysis.

Project 8

Family Matters: The Role of Extended Families in Dual-Career Decision-Making

Mentor: Richard Pitt

ASA Research Sections:

- **Education**
- **Emotions**
- **Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis**
- **Family**
- **Organizations, Occupations & Work**
- **Social Psychology**

Apprentices Requested: **3**

Anticipated RA Commitment Time: **Weekly in-person meetings, 12 hours solo work**

Project Description:

The project explores the role of extended families in dual-career decision-making, focusing on trailing spouses of STEM PhD students.

Through a qualitative analysis of 40 interviews, the study examines how extended families (primarily parents) influence significant decisions of their married adult children such as relocation, career paths, and family planning.

Utilizing Family Systems Theory and the concept of intergenerational support (both material and emotional)), the research highlights the ways these supports shape both immediate and long-term decisions for dual-career couples, while also introducing challenges, such as navigating conflicting expectations and balancing autonomy with familial influence.

The study offers insights into how extended family involvement can facilitate or complicate decision-making for adult children and discusses the long-term impacts of these dynamics on career trajectories and relationship satisfaction.

Project 9

The Production of Cultural Heritage in 21st-century Taipei

Mentor: Yen-Ting Hsu

ASA Research Sections:

- **Asia and Asian American**
- **Community and Urban Sociology**
- **Culture**
- **Political Sociology**

Apprentices Requested: **2**

Anticipated RA Commitment Time: **9-10 hours per week**

Project Description:

Historic preservation and urban redevelopment are two integral aspects of contemporary global cities. When cities revise existing land use plans, they face the challenge of deciding which old buildings to preserve and which to replace. In response, many global cities have established a cultural heritage review process to guide these decisions, assigning heritage status to select buildings based on their historical, aesthetic, and cultural significance. This designation ensures their continued presence in the cityscape through the exercise of public power. However, existing literature falls short of providing a systematic sociological examination of heritage production in the era of neoliberalism. Yen-Ting's project addresses this gap by exploring the urban politics and governance that shape the production of cultural heritage in 21st-century Taipei.

Last year, the RA team working with Yen-Ting has achieved four milestones:

(1) Completed CITI Program training with certifications in Social & Behavioral Research and Research Ethics.

(2) Developed a standardized coding process and conducted a grounded-theory-inspired analysis of 200 city agency meeting minutes, ensuring data validity and generating insights into local government practices.

(3) Improved the verbatim accuracy of 7-hour-long AI-transcribed interviews from 70% to 100% and generated 7 analytical memos for preliminary data analysis.

(4) Coded qualitative content into an original quantitative dataset for statistical analysis, based on 200 meeting minutes archives and their video recordings.

Building on these achievements, the RA team recruited this year will have the opportunity to participate in preparing qualitative and quantitative data for sociological analysis. By the end of this RA program, Yen-Ting's mentees are expected to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to conduct mixed-method research.

Project 10

Social Survey Movements in the US and China

Mentor: Yunpeng Chen

ASA Research Sections:

- **Comparative and Historical Sociology**
- **History of Sociology**
- **Theory**

Apprentices Requested: **2**

Anticipated RA Commitment Time: **12 hours per week**

Project Description:

In the early twentieth century, both the US and China experienced an unprecedented fervor for collecting societal data. This movement was driven by individuals with reformist passions, who sought to better identify and address social problems using this data. Their primary tool for this purpose was the social survey. Contrary to the nationwide censuses, which are designed, organized, and implemented primarily by the state, the early twentieth-century social surveys were largely promoted by non-state actors. These included academics, social workers, and charitable organizations, and they often concentrated on the livelihood of specific groups within a particular city or region.

Despite its achievements in political and academic spheres, the Social Survey Movement, as it was called in China and the US, lost momentum in both countries by the 1930s. This had a long-lasting impact on American sociology: the reformist and problem-solving spirit that once characterized the field largely disappeared after the 1930s. As a result, "solving social problems" became a controversial theme in sociology. Once in graduate school, sociology students "learn very quickly that even indicating they want to solve social problems makes others think they are naïve" (Prasad 2021: 2). The movement also influenced the Chinese Communist Party's understanding of surveys, which is now advocated as one of the Party's most precious traditions.

This project will explore the factors that led to the decline of social surveys. Specifically, I aim to explain why certain types of non-state researchers emerged as critical producers of social survey data in China and the U.S. during the early twentieth century. I will begin by examining key figures who played leading roles in the survey movement, with a particular focus on their social positions and connections, the tasks they assumed, the expertise they developed, and the resources they mobilized.

Project 11

The Rise of Femicide in Latin American Feminist Movements: Pathways to the Making of a New Political Issue

Mentor: Ana Lopez Ricoy

ASA Research Sections:

- **Collective Behavior**
- **Social Movements**
- **Comparative and Historical Sociology Culture**
- **Global and Transnational Sociology**
- **Latinx Sociology**
- **Political Sociology**
- **Sex and gender**

Apprentices Requested: **2**

Anticipated RA Commitment Time: **10 hours per week**

Project Description:

Although femicide is not a novel phenomenon—female murders have happened throughout history—they have become a relevant public issue in the past twenty years, especially in the Spanish speaking world.

This project seeks to answer: How and did femicide become such a central political issue in Latin America and what is its significance today?

More specifically, we will be centering on cultural communities and their contribution to making femicide into a political issue. In this part of the research, we will be looking at how communities of artists in specific contexts, such as the US-Mexico border, have brought attention to femicide. It entails doing archival research on artists, exhibition, cultural products, etc. In addition, we will be reaching out to the artists, undergoing interviews, transcribing, and analyzing them.