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Nick LaLone & Andrea Tapia

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INTRODUCTION

Fluctuations, technologies and media: social change and sociology change

Nick LaLone and Andrea Tapia

Sociology has long been criticized for not incorporating tools, imbued with power and the ability to interact as nonhuman, into its basic research paradigms (Latour, 2005). This criticism has continued as computation, ontologically and epistemologically pragmatic in its creation (Naur, 1985), has manifested philosophies of and about communication that are not accessible, nor discussed (Dourish, 2004). The technological makeup that sits at the foundation of computer-mediated communication has had tremendous impact on society itself. Despite that impact, there have been few sociological voices that focus on design, development, or programming languages. Instead, sociologists have examined use and consequence of use from the perspective of users themselves (see: Wellman, 2006). What work has been done within technology has not been loud enough to have lasting impact on design, development, nor programming languages. The fault does not sit within sociology, but within the development of computer science and much of the work of the technological sciences themselves. Sadly, this path for the technological sciences was foreseen by Thorstein Veblen in his work *The Engineers and the Price System* (Schatzberg, 2006; Veblen, 1963). Within just a few decades, technology has encountered, and incorporated, the fabric of society itself in its design repertoire (see Carroll, 2001).

Sociologists have begun to work toward regaining much of the social capital lost as technologists gained their current sway with society. At present, the Communication and Information Technologies section of the American Sociological Association (CITASA) has been a means through which Sociology can address and attempt to correct the criticisms levied toward sociology as a whole. The work of the sociologists in this section makes what Jennifer Earl calls a, 'reconnection between communication and sociology' (Earl, 2015). While important, I would take this statement one step further to say that this reconnection allows CITASA to regain computation as a means through which to do research and teaching. In fact, it even allows the expansion of Hampton, Hargittai, and Quan Haase's report that widened CITASA's goal to allow sociologists to explore the social consequences of computing (Elesh & Dowdall, 2006). It does this by aligning technology and society as overlapping, concurrent objects. This is an exciting time as the work CITASA members do has begun to expand beyond sociology itself, symbolizing a unique end and consequence to the period of diaspora from sociology.

The diaspora of sociologists interested in technology and communication has resulted in unique voices for sociology in Information Schools, Communication Schools, and many disciplines surrounding both the act and technologies of communication. By plainly

stating an intent to reconnect, CITASA begins to mend the wounds that caused the diaspora in the first place – the lack of nonhuman action within sociology as a whole. In 2015, the CITASA section took another step forward in reconnecting sociology, technology, and communication. Now called the Communication Information Technologies and Media Sociology section (CITAMS), the work performed in this section not only meets criticism from outside sociology, it also incorporates many newer developments inside of computer-mediated communication itself.

From cell phones to smart phones, chat rooms to social media, blogs to micro-blogs, VOIP to facetime, the means through which we communicate and the way society thinks about communication is changing rapidly, perhaps more so than it did throughout the twentieth century. This change is now so rapid that any research performed at present is antiquated long before it begins the process to publication. While antiquated, avoiding that research is often considered Luddite by those disciplines hyper-focused on technology itself. It is a catch 22.

The social capital lost by Sociologists throughout the technology-interested diaspora will be felt within Sociology for quite some time. Some have even called Sociology's job finished, pointing to the now common sense status of a variety of sociological concepts as proof. Further proof, some claim, can be seen in the consistent loss of available research funds and loss of academic departments as universities close or combine departments in the humanities and liberal arts. Still, for those of us in CITAMS, we understand that sociology still has more work to do and that that work will never be finished.

The space left for sociologists to perform their own brand of research has long since fallen out of favor. This is unfortunately nothing new. With new styles of communication come new interpretations of old social theory, new means of unequal representation, unequal access, and general levels of inequality as a whole (e.g., see Blank, 2013; Cotten & Gupta, 2004; Fisher, Stanley, Berman, & Neff, 2005; Robinson, 2007). The often unpopular work of sociology is quickly becoming an essential need as inequalities that began before these technologies were designed manifest in unexpected ways. Many of those unexpected manifestations of inequality are present within this issue. Still, as Howard Becker noted, 'Whose side are we on?' The evaluation of products fully formed does little to inform the production of those products nor the production of those inequalities. If sociology is on the side of pointing toward those inequalities, toward understanding technology's impact on communication, then a closer relationship with the technological sciences is needed. This section's growth may serve as a litmus test for that relationship.

This special issue of *Information Communication and Technology* for the CITAMS of the ASA comes during a year of flux. The incorporation of media sociology in the work surrounding media, or communication information technologies, is confusing but necessary. As Earl noted in her history of CITASA in 2014, 'the intellectual terrain of the section has again outgrown the confines of its current name' (Earl, 2015). As you will see, through media sociology the intellectual terrain is familiar, yet foreign, new, yet well-traveled. The collection of articles for this special issue reflects the new work being done to both map and settle the confines of the new CITAMS name. No doubt, we will see more boundary-defining work at the 2016 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. Perhaps by 2020, just four years from now, we will see yet another name change as we further broaden and strengthen our positions with regard to technology.

This issue is organized according to the categories past CITAMS work has generally defined (Earl, 2015). With the addition of media sociology, the incorporation of the new work necessitates the creation of new categories and new types of work. The first category in this special issue is that of the ‘social aspects of computing’. This is seen as an old tradition in the CITAMS-bounded space. Here, researchers traditionally engage what could be called the ‘digital divide’ (Van Dijk, 2006). In this issue, four articles embody this particular category.

The first article that falls under the heading, ‘Social aspects of computing’ is ‘Social Networking Sites and Low-Income Teenagers: Between Opportunity and Inequality’ from Marina Micheli. In this article, Micheli engages the so-called blank slate of social media. Wherein the only necessity for access is internet access, Micheli inquires as to the influence of socioeconomic background on the likelihood that teens will use social media. Drawing on a survey and broadened with interviews, Micheli finds that social media use is not necessarily related to socioeconomic background. However, SES is inversely related to exploration of certain features within them. The ‘elite’ teens often distance themselves from social networks, perhaps as a consequence of more concerted cultivation (Irwin & Elley, 2011).

As a partner to Micheli’s piece, Kelly Quinn’s ‘Contextual Social Capital: Linking the contexts of social media use to its outcomes’ examines what I would refer to as the database animal phenomenon (Azuma, 2009). Here, users create database entries that define themselves as people. Over time, a person’s social media profile represents them as a person. However, Quinn’s piece takes this concept and examines it from a social capital perspective. Interestingly, the researcher finds that outcomes for social capital are manifest when a particular social media use is in support of others, not self-serving. Overall, this article represents an important contextual nuance for engaging social media use and social capital concurrently.

Next, Christopher Ball’s piece, ‘Invaluable Values: An Expectancy-Value Theory Analysis of Youth’s Academic Motivations and Intentions’ discusses the possible leakages within the so-called STEM Pipeline. This pipeline, a metaphor representing those processes that create STEM careers, is often riddled with leaks. These leaks, the researchers propose, might account for lower minority representation within STEM fields as a whole. STEM, or the careers associated with the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, has been a focus for educators for quite some time (Garrett, 2008). These researchers use expectancy-value theory to propose that at some point during the education process, students from minority backgrounds are made to perceive STEM fields as having less value than other fields. Through data gathered at the elementary school level, these researchers find that expectancy-value theory (EVT) does indeed account for student’s decision to pursue a particular field. The leaks in the STEM pipeline these authors outline will no doubt be valuable to future STEM researchers.

The final article to fall under the auspices of ‘social aspects of computing’ is Wenhong Chen’s ‘In Game We Trust? Coplay and Generalized Trust in and beyond a Chinese MMOG World’. Within games research, non-American, non-European focused research is rare. These researchers work with data from the game *Chevaliers’ Romance III*. This research is unique in that it examines not the effect of technology on users in society, but societal influence on users in technology itself. This particular game calls upon the relationship between trust online and how culture occurring outside of the game can

influence that trust. These researchers examine the impact of familiarity, or homophily in the selection of teammates. Interestingly, these researchers find that, 'in-game social cohesion' may be over-estimated. In other words, the in-game culture does not have as much impact as other research has shown. This is an interesting discussion in that close social ties may not have an impact on the selection of teammates and trust in an online setting. It will no doubt prove valuable to those pursuing social network analysis in online settings.

While the design and social aspects of technology are important, 'communication and media systems' not only encompass the social or design and uses of technology, but also their place within communication itself. This realm of research is unique because it is a direct connection between the discipline of sociology and the variety of disciplines comprising the study of communication. Within this category are two pieces that are themselves unique.

The first piece that would be considered 'communication and media systems' but also an essential piece from media sociology. Maria Papadouka's piece, titled 'Agenda Setting and Active Audiences in Online coverage of Human Trafficking' engages what is quickly being called algorithmic culture (Striphas, 2015). Here, the researcher examines the impact of news articles on the rhetoric and frequency of discussion about human trafficking. In this article, the researchers scrape news articles from *The Guardian* and examine the article and comments as they relate to a meta-level discussion of human trafficking. This article, much like a similar piece from Jessie Daniels and Matthew Hughey, finds that engaging the comments of a particular news story is often difficult to engage concisely (Hughey & Daniels, 2013). While difficult, the research within this article will no doubt provide further inspiration to unraveling a method through which to examine these topics more easily.

Next, our final 'communication and media systems' piece falls under this heading very broadly. Guang Ying Mo's 'Does diversity create innovation? Examining cross-disciplinary communication's impact on multidisciplinary collaborations' examines the concept of innovation. This concept was called upon by Bruno Latour to refer to the mixture of pre-established, bounded spaces mixing together with the hope of creating new ideas is itself the subject of inquiry (Latour, 2005). Essentially, these researchers ask the question, 'how does cross-disciplinary communication effect innovation creation?' They find that those researchers who seek to innovate and find like-minded individuals in other disciplines, often do indeed produce innovative outcomes. This work will no doubt pique the interest in those researchers currently outside of sociology who have sociology degrees.

With those categories defined, the new realms of research from media sociology are important to consider. First, older technologies are rarely forgotten though they do often disappear for a time. Through media sociology, we can encounter work that is best conceptualized under the banner, 'repurposing old media'. The piece from Joan Donovan titled, 'Repurposing old media ... "Can you hear me now?" Phreaking the Party Line from Operators to Occupy' engages the communication methods used by the Occupy movement when their distributed network needed to communicate across their network. Donovan found that the Occupy movement repurposed a conference call technology in order to accomplish this goal. The researcher engages this concept through three specific moments in telephone history: telephone operators, the party line, and the conference call.

Finally, there is often a misnomer in the present about the concept of a digital native. This myth, this near straw man, is called upon to make assumptions among age groups about technology use and adoption. Under the banner, ‘aging in the age of information’, CITAMS gains a means through which not only to address the impact of age on technology use, but also the age of technology in society as well. The article that falls under this heading of, ‘aging in the age of information’ does just that.

The piece from Anabel Quan-Haase titled, ‘Interviews with Digital Seniors: ICT use in the Context of Everyday Life’ directly engages the concept of the digital divide and the digital native by engaging the so-called digital seniors about their everyday technology use. Quan-Haase finds that seniors had to adapt to these technologies, whereas younger individuals were socialized into a world in which they already existed. Despite this difference of engagement, the seniors Quan-Haase interviewed made conscious decisions as to where and when to use these technologies. Overall, she finds that many of the binary (online, offline) practices expressed by some are more blended, more hybrid than other groups that grew up with technology.

The articles in this special issue are exciting. A persistent and pervasive theme among these articles is that of social capital. From the social capital afforded to us by our socio-economic background to the social capital that manifests due to the way we were raised as children, this capital manifests differently, for different reasons, depending on the intent of a particular user. Methodologically, this collection of papers ranges from social network analysis to content analysis, survey to in-depth interview, and ethnography to dataset analysis. The work presented here has as much diversity as the technologies and subject matters that were engaged. As you read this collection of work from the 2015 meeting of the CITAMS section of the American Sociological Association, consider the tenets of media sociology and how they relate to work that is more communication information technologies. Or, if you are coming from media sociology, take a look at the work here that is not media sociology and consider how it relates to your own. In 2016, let us witness the birth of a new hybrid.

Notes on contributors

Nicolas J. LaLone, MA, is a PhD student in the Information Sciences and Technology program at Pennsylvania State University. He received his Master of Arts in Sociology from Texas State University in May of 2012. At Pennsylvania State University, Nicolas works primarily in human-computer interaction with special focus on the philosophies of computer science. His current projects include assembling disparate industries and disciplines and the data they produce as a representation of community resilience and infrastructure stability; observing the impact of translating human action from physical spaces, to the virtual spaces; and re-balancing computer-based and in-person simulations for the classroom or professional training spaces. In addition to his work as a PhD student, Nicolas is also the Director of the Game Studies Undergraduate Program at Bellevue University. When not working, Nicolas can be found playing fetch with his cats or cheering for his wife Kristen, as she prepares to enter graduate school to become a Veterinarian. The easiest way to contact Nicolas is through Twitter: @Nick_LaLone. [email: nick.lalone@gmail.com]

Dr Andrea H. Tapia is an Associate Professor of Information Sciences and Technology and the Director of Graduate Programs at the Pennsylvania State University. Dr Tapia is a Sociologist with expertise in social research methods and social theory, which she applies to the study of information and communication technologies (ICT) and their context of development, implementation, and use. Dr Tapia’s work contributes to the solution of one of the stickiest problems currently facing

disaster response organizations – the organizational inability to take advantage of an abundance of citizen-produced social media data. Dr Tapia also researches means by which local communities can better make use of collective technical action to provide for early warning and post-disaster recovery. Dr Tapia's research has directly contributed to the policy-making bodies of the United Nations, the US Obama Administration and the largest international relief and development organizations. As a US Fulbright scholar in Costa Rica, she studied the effects of a national-level legal mandate to coordinate and to share information upon the social and informational networks in the emergency response sector in Latin America. Dr Tapia maintains a Visiting Professorship in the Graduate Program on Emergency and Risk Management at the University of Costa Rica. Dr Tapia is the Chair of the American Sociological Association's Section on Information and Communication Technologies and is on the Board of the International Association for Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management. [email: atapia@ist.psu.edu]

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