

The AGORA

Newsletter of the Rationality and Society Section of the American Sociological Association and the Research Committee 45 on Rational Choice of the International Sociological Association

Summer 2018



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From the Chair's Desk

Jane Sell, chair of Rationality and Society Section



Dear Rationality and Society Colleagues,
Our Annual Meeting of the ASA will be in Philadelphia this year and we are looking forward to our section's activities in the "Birthplace of America." I want to first thank the section's generous council from this year: Vincent W. Buskens (past chair), Jun Kobayashi (Chair-elect), Neha Gondal, (Secretary/Treasurer), and Council members, Katrin Auspurg and Katie E. Cocoran. The council has been extremely helpful in working on this year's projects. (In news on other important projects, both Katie and Neha very recently had babies!)

Our section day is the FIRST DAY of the ASAs, Saturday, August 11th. Our first session occurs from 10:30 to 12:10. Katie Cocoran organized this session on *Theoretical and Empirical Advances in Rationality and Society*. This session features:

Agents beyond Control? Organizational Design, Distributed Digital Systems and the Problem of Corruption - Howard T. Welser, Ohio University; Edgar Kiser, University of Washington

None of Your Business: The Principal Agent Problem, or How Teens and Parents Negotiate Sex - Maria Grigoryeva, University of Washington

Sharing Compromising Information as a

Cooperative Strategy - Wojtek Przepiorka, Utrecht University; Diego Gambetta, European University Institute

Our invited session, from 2:30 to 3:30, features a discussion of the general perspectives of Rationality and Society. We will ask our invited speakers as well as the audience to consider: 1) How useful is the rational choice perspective—are there problems or challenges?; 2) Some have argued that the rationality perspective is actually just an economics perspective--do you agree/disagree?; 3) How does your own work use, not use, modify, challenge different theoretical perspectives in sociology, including rational choice?

The speakers featured include Jonathan Turner who, as you all know, has written a great deal about Rational Choice as well as other theoretical perspectives in our discipline. Also featured will be other speakers. While Peter Hedström was originally scheduled and may still be able to attend (although his orthopedic surgeon may disagree), Jun Kobayashi and I will also be discussing the issues.

Our business meeting occurs immediately after the invited session. At this session we will discuss the year's business, give our awards (see below for the announcement of the James Coleman Book Award) and discuss our future. At this meeting, the new officers will take over the session. We welcome:

Chair-Elect: Pamela Emanuelson
Secretary/Treasurer: Masayuki Kanai
Council Member: Emily Erikson.

Rotating off the council will be Vincent Buskens, Neha Gondel, and Katrin Auspurg; we are very appreciative of their service.

The section's reception will be from 6:30 to 8:10. This year's reception will be hosted along with the section on Mathematical Sociology and Evolution, Biology and Society.

All of our events are at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown. Please do plan on attending all these events!

A word of caution is also necessary: We need to stay vigilant about our section. We are quite small and as a consequence have to be careful about demonstrating our vitality. But, I also want to note our proud tradition. We began in 1993, with the active support of then President of the American Sociological

Association, James Coleman. (In fact, his presidential address was "The Rational Reconstruction of Society," delivered in the 1992 meetings). The first acting chair was Michael Hechter, who is still an active member of the section. The first edition of our newsletter, *The Agora*, was published in the fall of 1993. We publish *The Agora* now in conjunction with the International Sociological Association, Research Section 45 (Rational Choice). (Special thanks to our newsletter editors, Jun Kobayashi and Masayuki Kanai!)

We have a relatively large number of international members and these members have been important to the maintenance of our section. Given this, I want to make an especially strong plea to our ISA colleagues. Please join our ASA section if you have not already done so! We welcome you and promise a vibrant section with flourishing exchanges of ideas.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Philadelphia.

Jane

New Officer and Council Members at ASA Rationality and Society Section

Jun Kobayashi, nominating committee chair

The section welcomes **Pamela Emanuelson** as the new Chair-Elect, **Masayuki Kanai** as a Secretary/Treasurer, and **Emily Erikson** as a new council member for the upcoming year. Congratulations!

As always, we needed promising competitors for each position. Without them, we cannot maintain healthy voting. I sincerely thank those who volunteered to run.

The committee consisted of Andreas Diekmann, Emily Erikson, and Jun Kobayashi.



113th ASA Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, August 11-14, 2018

Section on Rationality and Society Program

Be sure to attend our **business meeting, Saturday,**

August 11, 3:30 to 4:10pm.

1. Theoretical and Empirical Advances in Rationality and Society

Sat, August 11, 10:30am to 12:10pm,
Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 4, 404

Description. This session will highlight recent methodological and theoretical advances featuring rational choice approaches.

2. Discussions with Recent Award Recipients from Rationality and Society

Sat, August 11, 2:30 to 3:30pm, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 4, 404

Description. This session will feature recent awardees in the Rationality and Society Section. This will include discussion of recent controversies within the rational choice perspective.

3. Section on Rationality and Society Business Meeting

Sat, August 11, 3:30 to 4:10pm, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 4, 404

4. Joint Reception: Section on Evolution, Biology, and Society; Rationality and Society; and Mathematical Sociology

Sat, August 11, 6:30 to 8:10pm, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, Level 5, Salon D

2018 Rationality and Society James Coleman Award for Outstanding Book

Damon Centola, committee chair



I am pleased to announce that the 2018 James Coleman Award for Outstanding Book in Rationality and Society is awarded to **Mario Small's *Someone To Talk To***. This book achieves the rare and impressive goal of combining original ethnographic data on people's social network ties with analyses of large scale empirical data in order to marshal both "micro" and "macro" level evidence for an empirically and theoretically generalizable challenge to a major structural theory of social networks and how they function.

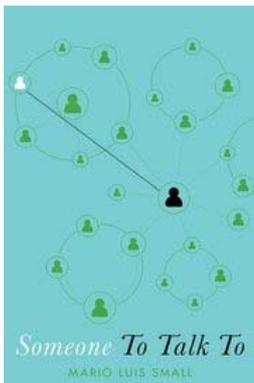
For nearly half a century, sociologists have built upon the very important theoretical foundation developed by Mark Granovetter's "Strength of Weak Ties" argument. Granovetter's argument showed that our "strong" ties –that is, our ties that are imbued with intimacy, trust, strong affect, and frequent interaction – are also structurally "closely knit". In other words, our strong ties tend to know each other. The normal assumption has always been that these ties are the locus of our most intimate conversations, confessions, and emotional support. "Weak ties" by contrast, are connections to strangers who do not know our friendship group, and thus are less likely to be trusted, have strong affect, be frequently interacted with, or be sources of meaningful support. Granovetter argues that while these weak ties are interpersonally not very important, they do play the very important structural role of bridging a large and complex population together. And, in so doing, they allow for information, diseases and behaviors to diffuse much more effectively than they would through strong ties.

The classic tension that remains after nearly fifty years of research on the strength of weak ties is that weak ties are "individually" the least important ties for any given person, but "structurally" they are the most important ties for understanding large scale diffusion across the network. Mario Small's fantastic book turns this wisdom on its head by arguing that there are many situations in which weak ties are the greatest sources of emotional support and intimacy. Small shows that strangers, not close friends, can sometimes provide the most intimate sources of social support.

Small's study empirically discovers a set of regular, even predictable, behaviors that emerge in people's normal, day to day, social networks, which contradict our most well-accepted theories of how social networks function. These detailed empirical insights have large-scale theoretical consequences. Small's ideas revolutionize James Coleman's classic notions of social capital by suggesting that the value of weak ties is not just that they provide access to new information, but that they can also be important, indeed essential, sources of social support. In these situations, social closure can inhibit, rather than promote, confidentiality.

Small's insights offer a new perspective on our classical assumptions about the privileged role of schools, neighborhoods, and churches, as the places where social support is found. Although people "say"

that their close friends are their best social resources for disclosing private information, this careful study shows that their behaviors betray the opposite. In making these discoveries, Small's work convincingly challenges decades of work on social capital, including Robert Putnam's famous notion that "bonding" social capital only adhere in small, cohesive groups, while "bridging" capital functions only to make connections across groups. Small opens up a new territory to explore: namely, the "bonding" experience among strangers. "Someone To Talk To" unveils an entirely new way of thinking about how the vast network of connections in a society creates opportunities for its members to have meaningful social exchanges with one another, and shows how the large, often accidental pattern of connection in a society, may offer vastly more forms of social capital for its citizens than we had previously imagined.



2017 Rationality and Society Section Award for Best Paper by a Graduate Student

Vincent Buskens, committee chair

The committee decided not to give an award this year.

Students on the Job Market

Name: Kerice Doten-Snitker

University: University of Washington

Website: <http://students.washington.edu/kmdoten/>



Research Summary: Who belongs? Who doesn't? This perennial question has become a principal touchstone

of contemporary politics. I study decisions about political exclusion and institutions that define and redefine political communities. Political and economic competition within a majority group provides incentives for increasing the exclusion of minorities.

Minority groups are part of the social structure; shifting laws and norms to exclude them are strategies to gain political or economic advantage in intra-group competition. My dissertation examines medieval urban expulsions of Jews in the Holy Roman Empire as policy decisions reached within a political economy that placed increasing value on religiously-based concepts of political responsibility and community purity. The patchwork landscape of overlapping jurisdiction created conditions of competition over legitimacy, supremacy, and rights to resources. Expulsions were a policy tool to manage foreign and domestic political relationships and help authorities achieve their political and economic goals.



From the President's Desk

Antonio M. Chiesi, president of RC45



Dear RC45 members,

Next week many of us will gather in Toronto to attend the XIX World Congress of Sociology. There are a lot of expectations around the most important initiative of the International Sociological Association. Since its Oslo constituent congress in 1949 under the auspices of the United Nations, its meetings have always been the milestones that have paced the evolution of our discipline in the global scientific world.

The World Congress is also the time when the governance is renewed. The new president and the different committees are elected for the next four years. RC45 is part of this system and during the Congress the past board members will pass the baton to the new ones, who have been very recently elected.

During these four years we have increased our initiatives. The number of sessions and the number of presented papers have increased, both in the Toronto World Congress 2018, as well in the Vienna third Forum 2016. I am convinced that the increase is not only in quantity, but also in quality. Thanks to the constant commitment of Jun Kobayashi, our Newsletter "Agora", edited together with our sister session of the American Sociological Association, has gained regularity and quality of content.

Moreover we have institutionalised the RC45 International Workshop, whose second edition took place in Utrecht in 2017, after the first edition in Torino 2013. We all are grateful to Jun Kobayashi (again), Masayuki Kanai, Carola Hommerich and Vincent Buskens who organized such a successful workshop. We have also completed the second edition of the "Best Student Paper Award", for the encouragement of RCT applications and developments among graduate students all over the world.

I would like to thank very much all the members

who have contributed to the activities of our Committee during the last four years.

I would like to thank especially the members of the outgoing committee, for their precious advice and commitment. What we have done is the outcome of a cooperative effort and the contribution of each one has been precious.

The new board will enjoy the experience of Michael Hechter (Arizona State University), who had been the first chairman elected in 1990, when RC45 was established, Jun Kobayashi (Seikei University), who will serve as new president, Masayuki Kanai (Senshu University), who will be secretary treasurer, and Rense Corten (Utrecht University). The board will also benefit of the advice and ideas brought by outstanding colleagues who will serve their first term: Christine Horne (Washington State University), Gianluca Manzo (CNRS and University of Paris Sorbonne), Tobias Wolbring (University of Nuremberg) and Naoki Sudo (Gakushuin University). My best wishes to all of them of a fruitful work for the benefit of RC45.

I am very much indebted with Kazuto Misumi and especially Antonio Jaime-Castillo, whom I have shared the duties of my term with. He has been always an open, clever, and efficient secretary treasurer. Hanno Scholtz has always been generous in giving special advice, as past president. Willie Jasso has dedicated much time for the benefit of our RC45. We all are grateful to her for having served as earnest and balanced Electoral Officer in the last elections.

This is my last message to the RC45. To me, these four years as president of the Committee have been extremely fruitful on the scientific side and very rewarding in terms of my own social capital. I feel very honoured having served as chairman, having met the interesting ideas of so many colleagues and having shared their enthusiasm in making initiatives. I hope my contribution has been of some utility in the name of our common endeavour.

I wish the new board members a rich and successful programme and everybody a fruitful research activity.

Antonio M. Chiesi

**New Officers and Board Members at ISA RC45
Rational Choice**

Guillermina Jasso, electoral officer

I am delighted to tell you that the members of RC45 have approved the slate of candidates for the Board. Happy, hearty congratulations to the winners:

President

Jun Kobayashi

Secretary-Treasurer

Masayuki Kanai

Members of the Board

Rense Corten

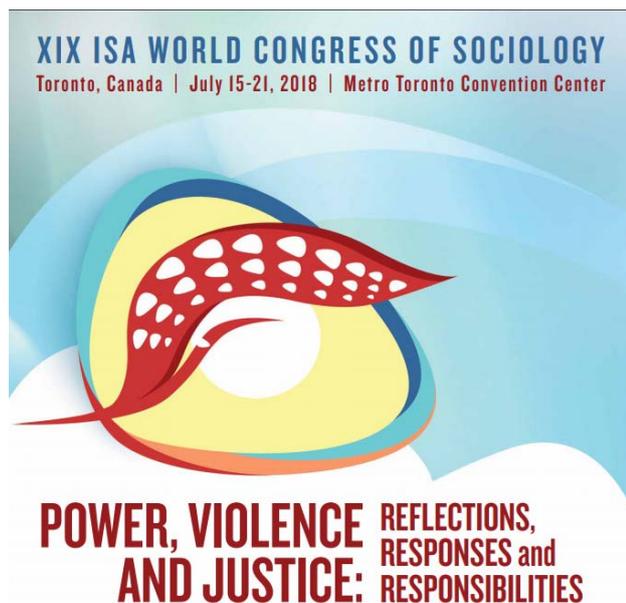
Michael Hechter

Christine Horne

Gianluca Manzo

Naoki Sudo

Tobias Wolbring



**XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology in
Toronto, Canada, July 15-21, 2018**

RC45 Program

Program Coordinator: Antonio M. Chiesi

Be sure to attend our **business meeting, Tuesday, 17 July, 19:30 to 20:50pm.**

**1. Social Behavior, Network Dynamics and
Collective Outcomes in Complex Societies**

Session Organizers: Flaminio Squazzoni and
Federico Bianchi

Monday, 16 July 2018: 10:30-12:20, 205A

(MTCC NORTH BUILDING)

2. Mechanisms of Normative Change

Session Organizers: Fabian Winter and Amalia
Alvarez Benjumea

Monday, 16 July 2018: 17:30-19:20, 706

(MTCC SOUTH BUILDING)

**3. Rational Action Approaches and Network
Analysis**

Session Organizer: Antonio M. Chiesi

Tuesday, 17 July 2018: 10:30-12:20, 712

(MTCC SOUTH BUILDING)

**4. Micro-Macro Link in Action and Relation
Systems**

Session Organizer: Kazuto Misumi

Tuesday, 17 July 2018: 17:30-19:20, 712

(MTCC SOUTH BUILDING)

5. RC45 Business Meeting

Tuesday, 17 July 2018: 19:30-20:50, 712

(MTCC SOUTH BUILDING)

**6. Rational Choice Approaches to Social
Inequality and Justice**

Session Organizer: Jun Kobayashi

Wednesday, 18 July 2018: 08:30-10:20, 712

(MTCC SOUTH BUILDING)

**7. Rational Exclusion: Rational Choice
Approaches to Social Exclusion**

Session Organizer: Yoshimichi Sato

Wednesday, 18 July 2018: 10:30-12:20, 712

(MTCC SOUTH BUILDING)

8. Reciprocity and Distributive Justice

Session Organizers: Antonio M. Jaime-Castillo
and Juan Carlos Castillo

Wednesday, 18 July 2018: 15:30-17:20, 716B

(MTCC SOUTH BUILDING)

9. Rationality and Collective Action

Session Organizer: Antonio M. Jaime-Castillo

Thursday, 19 July 2018: 08:30-10:20, 712

(MTCC SOUTH BUILDING)

10. Advances in Rational Choice Research

Session Organizer: Antonio M. Chiesi

Thursday, 19 July 2018: 10:30-12:20, Hall C
(MTCC NORTH BUILDING)

11. What Micro-Foundations for Agent-Based Computational Models?

Session Organizer: Gianluca Manzo

Thursday, 19 July 2018: 15:30-17:20, 712
(MTCC SOUTH BUILDING)

12. Rationality and Irrationality in Democracy

Session Organizer: Masayuki Kanai

Thursday, 19 July 2018: 17:30-19:20, 712
(MTCC SOUTH BUILDING)

New Logos Arrived!

Antonio M. Chiesi, president

ISA provided new logos of RC45 as below. They should be used in all the RC's communications (publications, website or blog, social media, conferences, etc). Members are encouraged to use them.



Recent Publications of Interest

Centola, Damon. 2018. *How Behavior Spreads: The Science of Complex Contagions* (Princeton Analytical Sociology Series). Princeton University Press.

Centola, Damon, Joshua Becker, Devon Brackbill, Andrea Baronchelli. 2018. "Experimental Evidence for Tipping Points in Social Convention." *Science* Vol. 360, Issue 6393: 1116-1119.

Jasso, Guillermina. 2018. "The Theory of Comparison Processes." Pp. 249-280 in Peter J. Burke ed., *Contemporary Social Psychological Theories*. Second Edition. Stanford University Press.

Jasso, Guillermina. 2018. "Anything Lorenz Curves Can Do, Top Shares Can Do: Assessing the TopBot Family of Inequality Measures." *Sociological Methods and Research*.

Opp, Karl-Dieter. 2018. "Externalities, Social Networks, and the Emergence of Norms: A Critical Analysis and Extension of James Coleman's Theory." *Social Research* 85(1): 167-196.

Editors' note

I joined the editorship of this newsletter in 2012. It has been just fun. Now it is time to take it over to a next generation. See you all in Toronto and Philadelphia this summer! (Jun)



Jun Kobayashi

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Masayuki Kanai

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