

Obfuscatory Relational Work and Disreputable Exchange

Sociological Theory
2014, Vol. 32(1) 43–63
© American Sociological Association 2014
DOI: 10.1177/0735275114523418
stx.sagepub.com



Gabriel Rossman¹

Abstract

This article develops a model of how the structure of exchange can manage such disreputable exchanges as the commensuration of sacred for profane. Whereas existing research discusses the rhetorical reframing of exchange, I highlight structures that obfuscate whether an exchange is occurring and thereby mitigate exchange taboos. I identify three such exchange structures: bundling, brokerage, and gift exchange. Bundling uses cross-subsidization across multiple innocuous exchanges to synthesize a taboo exchange. Brokerage finds a third party to accept responsibility for exchange. Gift exchange delays reciprocity and reframes exchanges as expressions of friendship. All three strategies have alternative meanings and so provide plausible deniability to taboo commensuration. The article concludes by arguing that these sorts of exchange structures represent a synthesis of “nothing but” reductionism and “hostile worlds” moralism, rather than an alternative to them as Viviana Zelizer suggests.

Keywords

relational work, economic sociology, morality

The core premise of economics is that human beings exchange to achieve gains from trade. However, nearly all cultures consider some potential positive-sum trades to be morally inappropriate. For instance, in the contemporary United States, it is generally considered immoral to pay money for sex acts or human organs. Often such taboos are simply honored and we refrain from engaging in disreputable exchange. In other cases, people use explicit moral suasion to argue that the exchanges should be understood as reputable. This article, in contrast, discusses a class of practices in which actors neither overtly challenge exchange taboos nor refrain from engaging in them but, rather, circumvent taboos through transactions structured so as to partially or totally obfuscate that a disreputable exchange is occurring at all.

Structural obfuscation of this sort is common and shapes important aspects of economy and society. For instance, it is exceedingly rare for physicians to accept naked bribes from pharmaceutical companies. Rather, pharmaceutical companies often send physicians to conferences at luxury resorts, give them honoraria to deliver lectures, and send attractive and

¹University of California–Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Gabriel Rossman, Sociology, UCLA, 264 Haines Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1551, USA.

Email: rossman@soc.ucla.edu

pleasant sales reps to provide them with free samples. In theory, a doctor could accept such favors and still refrain from prescribing a pharmaceutical company's drugs, yet there is an expectation of reciprocity. These practices are understood to create an ethically dubious conflict of interest, but even still, they are *relatively* tolerable compared to open kickbacks.

Likewise, although the occasional congressperson is discovered with piles of cash in the freezer, accusations of political corruption in the United States today tend to be fairly subtle. Campaign contributions and political action committees come under suspicion, as do practices like hiring a legislator's spouse or former staffers as consultants or lobbyists. In extreme cases, we see things like Representative "Duke" Cunningham selling his house to a lobbyist for a suspiciously high price above market value. As with pharmaceutical marketing, such practices can attract suspicion or criticism (indeed, Cunningham spent seven years in prison), but they are *less* disreputable than the outright purchase of legislation for cash, and many of these practices are routine.

Similar patterns could be found in Ancient Rome, where exchange taboos tended to be about the impropriety of senators engaging in commerce or professional services. Senators were able to square the circle of seeing themselves as Cincinnatus at his plow while still engaging in commerce by making their involvement in commercial enterprises tastefully indirect. Cicero, for example, affirmed the custom that legal representation should be undertaken "without payment" but acknowledged lawyers could benefit from having the powerful owe them favors and boasted that he had himself honorably inherited 20 million sesterces (about 40 million dollars) from grateful deceased clients (Cicero 1926:105; Cicero 1967:125). Likewise, Cato the Censor compared usury to murder but still underwrote shipping expeditions through the proxy of a freedman (Cicero 1967:134; Plutarch 2001:474–475).

A wide variety of exchange practices can be understood as indirections that ameliorate disgust. When two interactions are otherwise equivalent in terms of what flows from ego to alter and vice versa, we tend to see sublimated transactionalism as more palatable than open *quid pro quos*. Moreover, understanding this process provides the analytical leverage to begin reconciling the theoretical paradox in economic sociology and economic anthropology that is the nature of transactionalism (Bourdieu 2000; Zelizer 2005).

Of course, the causally prior issue to how people negotiate exchange taboos is that we first see some exchange circuits as taboo. Exchange taboos exhibit considerable diversity, but for clarity of exposition, it is helpful to refer to a typical disreputable circuit involving the commensuration of sacred and profane exchange objects (Zelizer 1978).¹ In this technical usage, *sacred* need not carry connotations of divinity or holiness, but only the etymologically core meaning of something "set apart," regardless of whether it is distinct because it is exalted or because it is fouled (Douglas 1966). This basic idea of a taboo commensuration of sacred for profane appears in many discussions of exchange taboos, under such names as "disparate relational models," "market inalienability," "corruption," "intrusions" of goods across "spheres," or "hostile worlds" (Fiske and Tetlock 1997; Krawiec 2009; Sandel 2000; Walzer 1983; Zelizer 2000). I will not venture to explain why a culture considers some objects to be sacred and others profane. Nor will I attempt to explain why one culture considers an exchange to be taboo whereas another finds it unremarkable. Rather, I will bracket these issues as causally prior motivation for a discussion of how people use structural obfuscation to manage circuits they find taboo.

Figure 1 diagrams three basic forms of exchange circuits. In these circuits, the actors are nodes labeled *ego* and *alter*, and the arcs are goods exchanged between these actors. Profane goods are labeled *A*, sacred goods as *B*, and reciprocated goods going back from alter to ego are marked as prime. The first circuit is the exchange of profane for profane, for instance, a customer and a grocer exchanging cash for groceries. The second circuit is the exchange of sacred for sacred, such as a married couple exchanging sexual intimacy. These circuits

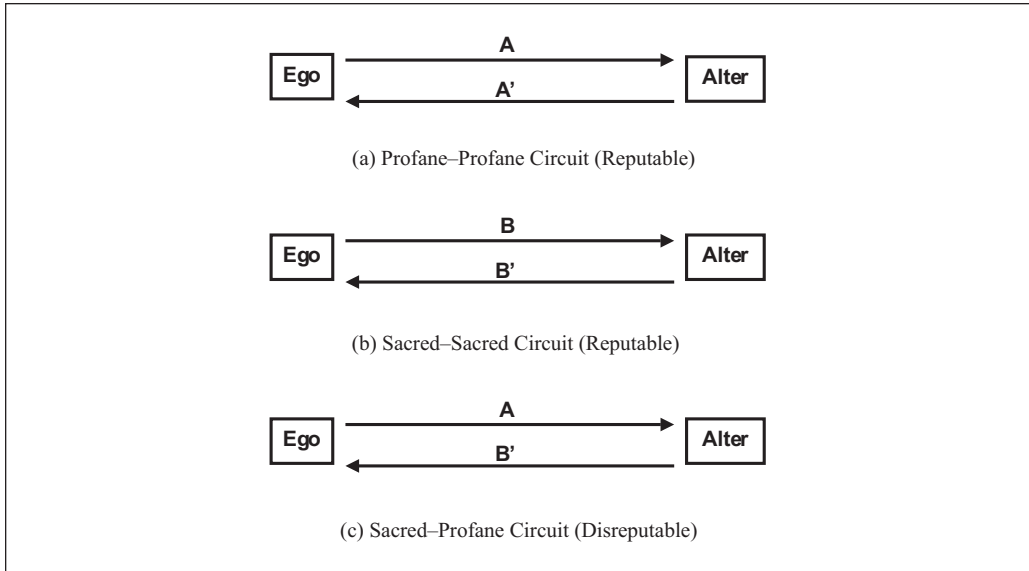


Figure I. Basic Zelizer circuits.

maintain the boundary between sacred and profane and are therefore reputable. The third circuit, however, shows a disreputable exchange of profane for sacred, such as a john and a prostitute exchanging cash for sexual intimacy. For clarity of exposition, this article uses fairly extreme examples of disreputable circuits, like prostitution and bribery, but we can imagine the argument applying to more subtle exchanges, such as faculty giving students cookies before distributing course evaluation surveys.

Taboos on commensuration of sacred and profane can be consequential not only for the individuals who participate in disreputable circuits but also on a historical scale. Most notably, the proximate cause of the Protestant Reformation was Martin Luther’s dispute with Pope Leo X over the Church’s sale of indulgences, which Luther decried as the commensuration of profane money with sacred absolution. Venial sin could be legitimately commensurated only with other sacred goods: prayer, penance, and time in Purgatory. This dispute over the legitimacy of the money-absolution circuit served as the catalyst for profound changes in religion and politics, not to mention millions of deaths in the Thirty Years’ War. More recently, DARPA (the U.S. military’s research arm) created the Policy Analysis Market as a way to exploit the power of prices to serve as efficient summaries of otherwise incomprehensibly complex bodies of information (Hayek 1945; Polk et al. 2003). Congress killed the project immediately on learning about it, primarily because of its indignation that a market in “terrorism futures” constituted blood money, a commensuration of the profane (monetary payouts from futures contracts) with the sacred (Americans murdered by terrorists) (Hanson 2007). Of course, to the extent one believes the economic theory underlying the Policy Analysis Market, such squeamishness has seriously hobbled U.S. intelligence.

The hostility that meets such disreputable circuits can dramatically reshape the relational work that characterizes them. Collins (2004:267) notes that because “disreputable or illegal circuits” are illicit, “rituals and symbols of everyday encounters within these circuits are very different in tone” from those that characterize reputable circuits. Similarly, offensive statements and suggestions tend to be phrased indirectly and ambiguously, with criminal speech (such as floating a bribe) being the extreme case (Pinker, Nowak, and Lee 2008). More generally, Fiske and Tetlock (1997) suggest that taboo commensurations are often concealed or obfuscated.

Collins emphasizes how exchange partners are motivated to avoid police attention, but social sanctions and stigma can also motivate such practices. Consider the taboo most Americans feel toward an explicit sex–money circuit. A man who is considering hiring a prostitute should probably be less concerned with the trivial punishments most jurisdictions impose on johns than with the ostracism he would likely face should this act become known to his family and peers. Furthermore, he might consider it a severe blow to his understanding of his own morality or masculinity if he were to define himself as someone who “pays for sex.” Social sanction and self-reproach remain severe barriers even in such jurisdictions as Nevada, where prostitution is merely disreputable but not punishable by law. Alternatively, we can imagine exchanges that are illegal but lack social sanction or self-reproach. Historically, this has been a common attitude toward tax evasion, including smuggling for the purpose of evading tariffs (Scott 1985; Torgler 2007). In many cases, formal and informal sanctions correlate, so people seek to obfuscate with regard to both the police and their peers. In cases where the reaction of only one audience is feared, the interaction will be shaped accordingly.

People generally try to avoid punishment, stigma, and self-reproach. The most direct way to do so is simply to honor the taboo, and norms do seem to have nontrivial effects on action (Vaisey 2009). Indeed, actors may demand long-term relationships with trading partners to build trust that goods will not be used in taboo fashion (Wherry 2012). When actors are not dissuaded outright from engaging in disreputable circuits, they may seek ways to avoid sanctions. Prior research shows how actors rhetorically reframe their exchanges as legitimate, often by emphasizing the social benefits that accrue from these exchanges or the sympathetic people who benefit, or by emphasizing altruistic motives in the selection of and interaction with exchange partners (Anteby 2010; Haylett 2012; Quinn 2008; Zelizer 1978).² Alternatively, taboo suggestions can be shrouded in indirect speech, allowing enough ambiguity to maintain plausible deniability (Pinker et al. 2008). Similarly, markets with a monetary aspect may use prices in symbolically loaded ways, such as setting prices above or below market clearing (Wherry 2008). For instance, some participants in human tissue markets charge at cost to demonstrate disinterested motives (Anteby 2010). Conversely, because art’s value is often defined by its price rather than the other way around as with typical commodities, art dealers feel a moral obligation to keep prices high rather than degrade art by explicit discounting (Velthuis 2003). This article discusses relational work that goes beyond rhetoric and prices and into definitions of situations that reshape the very structure of circuits and transactions (Fuhse 2009).

In contrast to the relative simplicity of many reputable profane–profane circuits, actors involved in circuits that commensurate the sacred and profane may form the circuit in convoluted ways where the commensuration is less explicit. Thus we can ask, What are the differences in the structure of an exchange when a record label buys an ad in a magazine compared to buying radio airplay? Or the difference between arranging a fixed rate on the principal loan in a culture that sees this as mundane versus one that sees it as sinful? Or for a man to buy a drink as compared to buying a woman’s affections? The difference, to paraphrase Goffman (1963:88), is that what would be nonchalant *quid pro quo* for reputable exchanges can become elaborate structures for discreditable exchanges. In particular, whereas much of the economic sociology literature emphasizes that disentanglement of persons and objects from social relationships is necessary to transform them into commodities (Callon 1998; see also Graeber 2011:146), I argue here that obfuscating disreputable exchange often involves *re*-entanglement so as to make objects look *less* commodified. This logic follows from Fiske and Tetlock’s (1997) argument that disreputability in exchange often stems from moving goods appropriate to intimate relationships into a market context.

Superficial encounters, like those with a supermarket cashier, are much more routinized than personal friendships (Fuhse 2009:61), but one way to mitigate the scandal of routinizing sacred–profane exchanges is to de-routinize and re-entangle them.

In some cases these complicated structures merely demonstrate discretion, but frequently they achieve a more profound redefinition of the situation, encompassing one or both actors in the exchange and thereby insulating them from self-reproach. As Bourdieu (2000:192) argues, there is “collective self-deception” about the twofold truth of gifts: they are expressions of relationships *and* forms of exchange. As implied by the phrase “self-deception,” the parties to an exchange do not necessarily subjectively perceive it as economic in nature. We can speak of an exchange being (to use Bourdieu’s favorite phrase) *as if* actors were trying to obfuscate, yet recognize that the dual process of intuition and reasoning means this may characterize their subjective experience quite well, only loosely, or not at all (Vaisey 2009). Moreover, parties to an interaction may vary considerably in the extent to which they perceive it as calculable. In many of the examples I will present, a special delicacy appears to surround one role or another.³ In other words, structural obfuscation eliminates open awareness (in which the exchange is common knowledge to its participants), and what remains may be closed, suspicion, or pretense (Glaser and Strauss 1964). Likewise, to say that a practice obfuscates taboos does not mean it does so completely or in every instance. Indeed, there is an expository value to liminal cases: for one to recognize an exchange as obfuscating a taboo, the exchange must remain somewhat disreputable even in its mitigated form.⁴ Moreover, behaviors that would normally be tolerated or tactfully ignored can become scandalous through the efforts of a determined moral entrepreneur (Adut 2008; Goffman 1963). This risk of hostile intercession—discrediting the discreditable—is more likely for exchanges that are plausibly understood as essentially equivalent to scandalous exchanges. Most of the examples discussed in this article fall into a middle ground on subjective understanding and efficacy at taboo mitigation: actors may be dimly aware they are flirting with disreputability, and structural obfuscation will mitigate the disreputability without eliminating it.

I identify three ways the structure of circuits can be used as relational work to mitigate the disreputability of exchange. In all three forms, relational work goes beyond rhetoric and prices to restructure the exchange. Bundling is the aggregation of multiple circuits between the same transactants. Brokerage is third-party mediation between transactants. Gift exchange occurs when transactants exchange asynchronously, and the exchange is framed as being about the nature of their relationship. Finally, the article closes with a discussion of how obfuscating disreputable exchange through relational work represents not a rejection of exchange taboos but, rather, their circumvention and even backhanded affirmation.

BUNDLING

The Qur’an contains several passages that forbid *riba*.⁵ The concept has something to do with debt, but it is not obvious from the text exactly what kinds of debt are *riba*, and a considerable body of Islamic jurisprudence addresses the details of what is forbidden. Fairly early on, the narrow reading of *riba* as debt bondage lost out to a broad interpretation of it as any interest, regardless of whether human beings were collateral. Nonetheless, sharia law allows a loophole with *murabaha*, an institution that combines theoretically distinct transactions to synthesize what are, in effect, fixed points on the principal loans.

[Muslims] went on [charging interest] through various ruses, such as the following practice that leading jurists endowed with legitimacy: A wants to lend B \$100 at 5 percent interest, but without violating the ban. So he buys a chair from B in return for

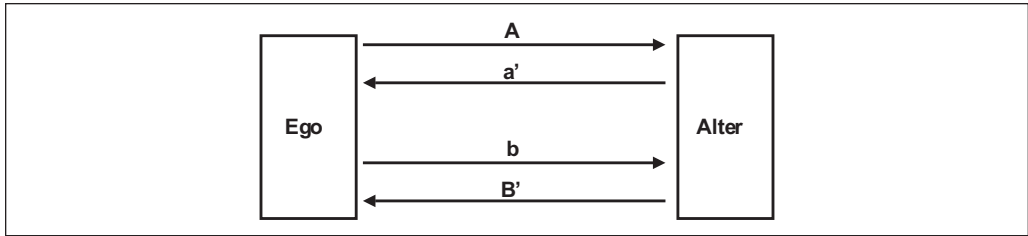


Figure 2. Bundling.

\$100 and then promptly returns it for \$105, payable in one year. The chair's ownership remains unchanged; B receives \$100 now; and A stands to receive \$105 in a year. Although the individual transactions involve no interest, together they are equivalent to a single transaction whereby A lends \$100 to B at 5 percent per annum. (Kuran 2004:15)

Here we see bundling used to circumvent a disreputable circuit (ego lends money to alter at interest) by combining one reputable circuit (sale from ego to alter with immediate payment) with a second reputable circuit (sale from alter to ego with deferred payment).

Bundling refers to exchanges that could, in principle, be separated but are nonetheless packaged together as a single exchange. The two major reasons for bundling discussed in the economics literature are efficiency and price discrimination.⁶ In addition to the sorts of issues familiar to micro-economics, bundling may also be used as a form of relational work. This sense of bundling is related to Zelizer's concept of "differentiated ties" (Zelizer 2000). This structure occurs when ego and alter engage in multiple types of exchanges. For instance, the 1924 case of *Stewart v. Waterman* involved a man and a woman whose relationship began as an exchange of money for housecleaning labor and over time developed a romantic and sexual dimension (Zelizer 2000:830). Zelizer suggests that in a differentiated-ties relationship, actors can engage in multiple circuits operating in parallel, notwithstanding the frequent objections that the two circuits constitute "hostile worlds" or that the sacred circuit is ultimately "nothing but" a profane one. We can conceive of bundling as a more cynical interpretation of differentiated ties: actors implicitly or explicitly attempt to commensurate sacred and profane, and bundling makes this disreputable commensuration appear to be a set of reputable circuits operating parallel to one another.

Figure 2 illustrates how bundling can accomplish this goal. Suppose that ego and alter wish to form a circuit that exchanges the profane good A for the sacred good B', but to do so in a palatable manner. They may form what appear to be two circuits, an exchange of a valuable profane good for one of only token value, and an exchange of a token-value sacred good for a valuable sacred good. In the figure, token goods are shown as lowercase to denote their trivial value. Actors can then maintain the pretext that there is no scandal about their exchange, because they are engaged in differentiated ties of two reputable circuits, profane for profane and sacred for sacred.

The possibility of incommensurable dimensions of value bleeding between bundled circuits may explain why people are so often uncomfortable with differentiated-ties relationships, to the point of subjecting them to formal sanctions (Zelizer 2005). Such objections are based on the (sometimes accurate and sometimes not) suspicion that the circuits, taken individually, are not fully reciprocal in value, and this gap is made up for by cross-subsidizing value across circuits. These relationships form disreputable sacred–profane circuits. For instance, professional societies generally prohibit sex between professionals and clients on the grounds that the sexual aspect of the relationship and the professional–client aspect of

the relationship could bleed into each other, including the possibility that terms of compensation for professional services (e.g., waiving fees) could implicitly constitute payment for sex (Zelizer 2005).

Because bundling is framed as multiple exchanges of different types between the same set of actors, it can facilitate exchanges people would prefer to avoid engaging in openly. For instance, mainstream news outlets consider it unethical to pay news sources.⁷ Nonetheless, witnesses to spectacular crimes do get paid. To evade their own ethical rules, major television networks will buy witnesses' documents, such as family photos and home movies (Kolhatkar 2010). The witness then "volunteers" to be interviewed. In principle, the news organization is not violating its own rule against money–interview circuits but is only forming differentiated ties with the witness, a money–documents circuit alongside an interview–exposure circuit, and this obviates the ethical transgression against "checkbook journalism."

BROKERAGE

From 2004 through 2006, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and other investigators uncovered the role of lobbyist Jack Abramoff in U.S. politics (Continetti 2006; U.S. Senate, Committee on Indian Affairs 2006). Like all lobbyists, Abramoff helped connect interests seeking favorable legislation or administrative rulings to policy makers, but Abramoff's activities became scandalous when revealed and were denounced by moral entrepreneurs in the U.S. Senate and political press. Many of his clients were Indian tribes seeking to protect their casinos or inhibit competition from other gambling interests. For instance, Abramoff brokered a deal between the Choctaw nation and former Christian Coalition president Ralph Reed (U.S. Senate, Committee on Indian Affairs 2006:23–25). The Choctaw paid Reed millions of dollars through Abramoff's firm and related organizations, in exchange for Reed rallying religious-right social movements against video poker and other potential competition to Choctaw casinos.

Choctaw executives and Reed were cognizant of the nature of the deal, but they sought to keep it discreet because bootlegger-Baptist coalitions, in which an interested party uses an ideological actor as a political front, lack legitimacy by nature (Yandle 1983). Reed's ability to serve the interests of the Choctaw, eLottery, and other gambling interests by rallying religious conservatives depended on his ability to frame his actions as a principled opposition to gambling. His position fell apart once it was revealed as an attempt to protect the territory of one gambling interest against competition from another or to block legislation unfavorable to gamblers.

Throughout it all, Reed took great pains to make sure that he never *directly* received money from gambling interests. If that were to happen, it would pose a problem to his future political ambitions, as he is on record saying that gambling is a "cancer" on the body politic and that he had been "opposed to gambling throughout my entire career." So he and Abramoff found ways around direct payments. (Continetti 2006:153)

Abramoff not only introduced gambling interests to Reed, but his persistent brokerage of the deal allowed the two primary parties to obfuscate what would otherwise have been a relatively obvious bootlegger-Baptist deal, with all the disreputability that implies, if gambling interests had paid Reed directly.

Brokers facilitate and mediate exchange and usually extract resources for their troubles (Fernandez-Mateo 2007; Stovel and Shaw 2012). With the popularity of social network analysis, brokerage increasingly refers to taking advantage of a structural position of power

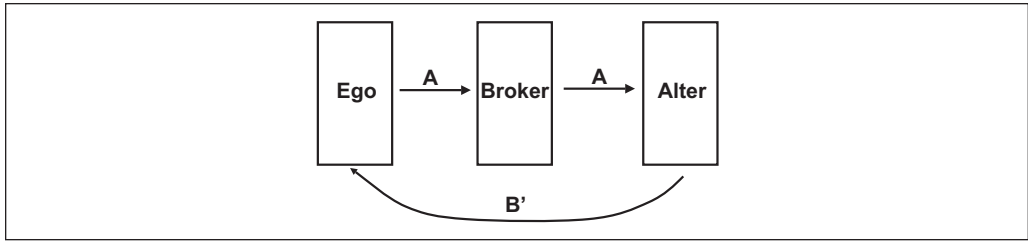


Figure 3. Brokerage.

(often measured as betweenness centrality) in a social network, where paths between ego and alter pass through the broker (Burt 1992; Freeman 1977; Marsden 1982). In some cases, a broker facilitates markets where buyers and/or sellers are low-volume traders. For instance, because cultural industries often work on a project basis, brokers, such as talent agents and scouts, are extremely important in mediating relations between artists and cultural firms (Bielby and Bielby 1999; DiMaggio 1977; Zuckerman 2004). Likewise, people who need access to bureaucratic corruption usually do not do so routinely, and such services can obviously not be openly advertised. Actors seeking a corrupt service may thus rely on brokers to identify a corrupt counterparty, even if they do not especially care about sublimating the venal nature of the interaction (Jancsics 2013).

A central problem for the brokerage literature is how brokers maintain their positions (Stovel, Golub, and Milgrom 2011). Precisely because primaries are structurally vulnerable to exploitation by brokers, primaries will tend to distrust brokers.⁸ Moreover, subsequent to the initial brokered exchange, we would expect to see triadic closure, after which the primaries could exclude the broker. The persistence of brokerage thus requires a substantive mechanism to overcome its structural ephemerality. One such mechanism is that brokers are often a distinct (even stigmatized) social type for whom trading is seen as an appropriate role. That is, it may be taboo for ego and alter to trade directly, so the broker takes on moral responsibility for forming the circuit.

Figure 3 shows a brokerage relationship. Ego gives profane good A to the broker, which the broker passes on to alter (presumably after having taken a cut). Alter then gives ego sacred good B'. In this model, no two actors directly exchange A for B', and transfers are sequential so the circuit's exchange of sacred and profane remains relatively subtle. Ego, and possibly alter, have plausible deniability that taboos are being violated. We might thus expect ego to have a more naive view of the exchange than does the broker, on the "I didn't ask questions how he did it" model. The broker may assume legal risk for an illegal exchange, but brokerage can also make a legal but tacky exchange more palatable by making the commensuration of sacred and profane less salient to ego and alter.

One common form of brokerage can be found in labor relations. Brokerage for labor can serve entirely reputable purposes, such as reducing search costs, as when a parent who does not personally know any suitable neighborhood teenagers contracts with a service to find and vouch for a babysitter. However, brokers can also insulate ego from moral or legal responsibility for engaging the labor of inappropriate people or under inappropriate terms. For instance, the early 1980s decline in private-sector unionization of Los Angeles janitors took the form of subcontractors mediating relationships between building management and janitors (Waldinger et al. 1998). More generally, labor conditions ranging from legal but unfavorable employment terms to outright labor law violations often occur with subcontractors. Labor activists and unions try to discredit the discreditable by framing brokerage—the subcontractors—as irrelevant and by pointing to the main relationship circuit between the primary actors.

As an example of brokerage making a disreputable exchange of profane for sacred less salient, consider establishments where men implicitly pay women to dance or flirt with them. Unlike paying for sex, there is nothing illegal about paying for dancing or flirtation. This happens fairly explicitly at taxi dance halls, where men use token money to buy a minute or two of dancing time with a woman (Cressey [1932] 2008; Wright 1999). For some people, however, it may spoil the interaction if the exchange of money for flirtation is too explicit. Some businesses thus use brokerage as a form of relational work to restructure the exchange of money for flirtation into something that assumes the form of conventional courtship.

A late nineteenth and early twentieth century example is the "'49 dance hall" or "'49 camp," in which "the dancing was free and the partners or 'hostesses' secured their income not from the dancing, but upon the amount of liquor which they could persuade the patrons to buy at the adjoining bar" (Cressey [1932] 2008:24–25). Rather than paying a woman for a dance as in a taxi dance hall, at a '49 dance hall, a man merely danced with a woman and bought overpriced drinks from the bar, which would later pay the woman a commission. In this form of enterprise, the bar serves as a broker such that the dance partners need not directly exchange cash, or even token money.⁹

Similar but more subtle services are found at today's high-end nightclubs, where, as part of "bottle service," the bar's VIP host serves a brokerage role to facilitate flirting with important customers (Taddeo 2010). In these clubs, men buy alcohol at a several thousand percent markup. The host then finds attractive young women guests and encourages them to join the customer's party so as to get free drinks and potentially meet a rich boyfriend. The relational work of structuring the exchange so it appears to follow courtship rituals allows the customer to maintain the understanding that flirtation with the women is a sacred–sacred circuit of charm being exchanged in kind, and his profane interaction of \$2,500 plus tip for a couple bottles of vodka with the nightclub can be understood as orthogonal.

Status is a special type of good exchanged through bundling.¹⁰ In the status tradition, an economic actor's status is not only revealed, but arguably *constituted*, by the patterns of deference and association in which an actor is enmeshed (Gould 2002; Martin 2009; Podolny 2001, 2005). That is, status is both operationalized and conceived of as a network concept. One implication is that because low-status actors can raise their status through association with high-status actors, this gives high-status actors the ability to demand preferential terms of trade (Podolny 2005). For instance, Apple can persuade some suppliers to sell at close to cost because Apple is so prestigious that this association increases the supplier's status. In effect, such exchanges involve the bundling together of profane goods with a status transfer. This example differs somewhat from other cases discussed here, insofar as it is not exactly *disreputable* for firms to sell status a la carte, so much as it is *impossible*, because status exists only if it is agreed to exist, and third parties would not be impressed by an open sale of status.

GIFT EXCHANGE

Under U.S. Code 47 § 317, it is a crime, colloquially known as "payola," to pay a radio station to play a song. Implicitly, the federal government understands the artistic gatekeeping decisions of radio disk jockeys and programmers to be sacred. Nonetheless, record labels have a strong incentive to pay for airplay (Coase 1979; Hirsch 1972). Historically, payola was often organized as a (furtive) quid pro quo (Dannen 1990; Fisher 2007). From the 1950s through the mid-1980s, relationships between record labels and radio stations were usually structured as quid pro quos, often with the involvement of professional brokers. Following scrutiny from the press and federal prosecutors in 1986, the Recording Industry Association

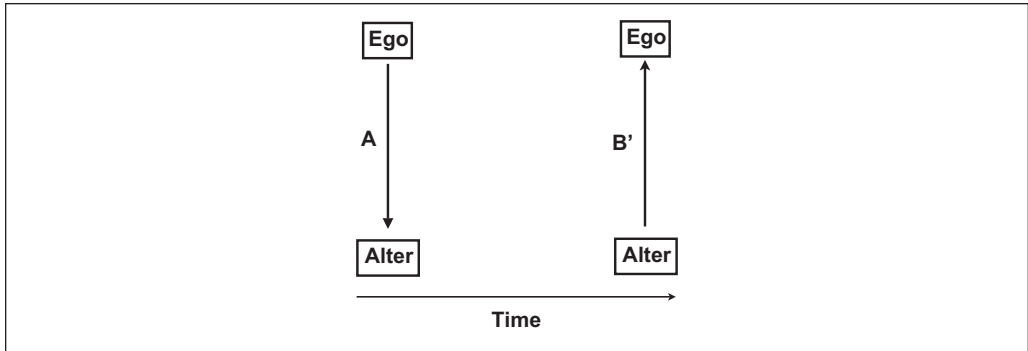


Figure 4. Gift exchange.

of America voted for reforms that displaced the incumbent semi-criminal brokers (Dannen 1990). The post-1986 system still involves record labels giving pecuniary resources to radio stations, and radio stations giving airplay to record labels, but the new system is much more subtle than the old model.

Many documents from the reformed system reflect a language of friendship and favors between record labels (or their brokers) and radio stations (Rossman 2012). Although *quid pro quos* can be found, it is not uncommon to see one party offer or request a favor or gift without any explicit mention of reciprocity. Nonetheless, there is an asymmetry to the nature of these favors: favors from labels to stations always have pecuniary value (e.g., plane tickets, concert tickets, or consumer electronics), and favors from stations to labels consist of airplay. Among radio programmers Ahlqvist and Faulkner (2002) interviewed, some accepted gifts but claimed they did so only after they had committed to their creative decisions. In contrast, another programmer claimed to refuse gifts from record labels on grounds that “I would hate to be in a situation where I felt I had to play a record because I owed somebody a favor” (Ahlqvist and Faulkner 2002:201). Programmers who refuse gifts from labels suspect this is ultimately a form of exchange, but the indirect structure makes the exchange subtle enough so as to not subjectively feel like a *quid pro quo* to programmers who do practice gift exchange.

Figure 4 provides a schematic illustration of gift exchange relationships.¹¹ Ego gives a good to alter without explicit reciprocity. Usually at some later time, alter gives a good to ego. The lack of explicit reciprocity and the delay make reciprocity semi-voluntary, and this obfuscates that in some sense the gifts are exchanged for each other (Bourdieu 1990, 2000). In the schematic, the initial gift is profane and the reciprocity sacred, but any combination can work. It is common, but not essential, for gifts to be in-kind to convey a sense of intimacy rather than payment. Even when gifts are monetary, they are often earmarked for particular purposes or delivered with ceremony (Zelizer 1994). Furthermore, over time, a relationship may involve many transfers in both directions.

Variations on gift exchange are extremely common historically and cross-culturally; indeed, they are more important than market exchange in nonindustrial societies (Bohannan 1955; Carrier 1991; Graeber 2011; Mauss 1967). The vestigial character of gift exchange in modern societies, however, implies a distinction “between things that are free and things that have a price-tag,” between sacred and profane (Bourdieu 2000:197). Similarly, Fiske (1992) provides a somewhat more complicated model of four “relational models” of exchange (market pricing plus three forms of gifts) and argues that exchange taboos can be understood as commensurating goods that belong to different models, especially when goods appropriate to communal sharing are exchanged through market pricing (Fiske and Tetlock 1997).

In principle, gift exchange is embedded within a social relationship, and gifts in either direction are seen as reflecting ego and alter's relationship (Bohannon 1955). That is, rather than understanding A as being (asynchronously) exchanged for A', a smoothly functioning gift exchange treats A as an expression of ego's relationship to alter, and A' as an expression of alter's relationship to ego. The reality underlining this perception is that gifts and counter-gifts are given sequentially and reciprocity is semi-voluntary. The essential distinction between gift exchange and quid pro quo is that a gift is given irrevocably before a counter-gift is offered. For instance, universities classify industry money as gifts (and thus exempt from indirects, unlike sponsored research) "only if funds are awarded irrevocably" (Biscotti et al. 2012:285). This makes a gift a sequential variant on the prisoner's dilemma; game theory tells us that a rational alter in such a game should defect, and by backward induction, so should a rational ego. This is even more complicated if opportunities for reciprocity are not immediate but play out over time such that ego who has yet to receive a counter-gift from alter must wonder if alter has truly defected or if reciprocity is merely right-censored (Bourdieu 1990).¹² For gift exchange to be accomplished, interpersonal trust or socialization must be present—successful use of gift exchange can thus build trust (Molm, Takahashi, and Peterson 2000).

The idea of exchange reflecting and intensifying the underlying relationship between ego and alter is seen in the first papal encyclical of Benedict XVI (2005), which contrasts two opposing aspects of the single phenomenon of love. Benedict describes eros (needy love, including lust) as by nature good and an essential part of the human experience but vulnerable to degradation, as when "eros, reduced to pure 'sex,' has become a commodity, a mere 'thing' to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity." He argues that human existence is most ennobled when eros develops into and fuses with agape (selfless love), such that transfers are both given and received as expressions of love. It follows that in this ideal form of gift exchange, ego and alter will have a somewhat relaxed accounting of reciprocity, because (at least in theory) they are not exchanging goods for their own sake but to express their social bond. If ego treats alter to a moderately priced dinner, and alter reciprocates on another occasion by treating ego to an expensive dinner, it would be boorish for ego to make up the cash difference. The exchange is dinner and the company that goes with it, not the cash value of the bills.

Because gift exchange can frame circuits as mutual expressions of a relationship rather than as exchange, it facilitates the commensuration of profane and sacred. This holds even if the relationship is entered into with the expectation that it will facilitate such a commensuration. The difference between prostitute and john, on the one hand, versus sugar baby and sugar daddy, on the other, is largely an issue of whether a man and woman explicitly bargain over a sex-money circuit or have a less formal understanding that he will give her gifts (Zelizer 2005). The U.S. District Court faced this issue in the 2009 case *United States v. Roger Weiner*. The defendant, a politically active cardiologist, had an account on the dating website *sugardaddyforme.com* (Balko 2009). FBI agents repeatedly contacted Dr. Weiner through the site, but their solicitations were apparently too explicit for him, and he rebuffed them by explaining there is "a difference between a sugar baby and a hooker, and I'm not interested in a hooker." Weiner replied more favorably to an inquiry that did not involve an explicit discussion of compensation, and the FBI arrested him and charged him with violating the Mann Act by inducing a woman to cross state lines for purposes of prostitution. The FBI and U.S. Attorney argued that any form of exchange of sex for pecuniary value constituted prostitution, but the court accepted the defense's distinction between a sugar daddy versus a prostitution relationship. Placing this exchange in the form of a gift relationship successfully mitigated the legal and moral taboos that would have been felt by both Dr. Weiner and the court in the case of explicit prostitution.

FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper has explained how the structure of an exchange can serve as relational work to mitigate taboos that might exist were the same exchange achieved through open quid pro quo. As seen in the various examples presented here, obfuscated exchanges can be found in wide-ranging substantive cases. It is my hope that this paper will be generative of empirical inquiry. At the simplest level, this means understanding how these phenomena work in various settings, but such investigations would not just catalog events. Rather, empirical inquiry can provide analytic leverage to address related research questions, concerning both relational work issues internal to the model and implications for broader social phenomena, like market efficiency and network structure.

The most basic question we might ask is, When do actors use structure to obfuscate exchange? For illustrative purposes of defining a class of social phenomena, this article described various cases of the phenomena in question rather than treating it as a contingent response to a causally prior event or setting. If we instead start with scenarios where people desire an exchange but recognize it to be disreputable, we see that several options are available: people can simply make the exchange, disreputability be damned; they can engage in explicit moral reasoning to justify the exchange; they can obfuscate the exchange through structuring it as bundling, brokerage, or gifts; or they can forgo the disreputable exchange altogether. Criminology and deviance tend to focus on the first class of responses, much of the scholarship on relational work on the second, this paper on the third, and the sociology of morality on the fourth (Ehrlich 1996; Granovetter 2007; Vaisey 2009; Weitzer 2009; Zelizer 1978). This emphasis on different responses can cause us to lose sight that all of these broad categories of action are responses to the same basic dilemma: what do people do when there are gains from disreputable trade? My ordering of these responses—unapologetic transgression, apologetics, obfuscation, and then abstention—is deliberate, for as I will argue in the conclusion, obfuscation shares important features with outright abstention. Even if we put aside the alternative actions and focus just on structural obfuscation, we can still ask why a particular exchange follows a particular structure? There may be affinities between certain types of taboos and the structures that most comfortably mitigate them; although such affinities must be loose, as I have shown diverse exchange taboos circumvented through similar structures. Likewise, the form of structural obfuscation might be shaped by more mundane issues, such as the volume of transactions engaged in by the buyer, the seller, or the dyad of the two together.

We can also ask how effectively an exchange is obfuscated, to each transactant and to third parties, and when and how this deniability breaks down. As discussed in the introduction, for expository purposes I describe actors as consciously structuring exchange but allowed that their subjective experiences may vary widely, from lucid culpability to compartmentalization or dual consciousness to fully internalizing the premise that structure legitimates the exchange (Bourdieu 2000). We might imagine that subjective understanding of an interaction as exchange will be inversely correlated with the extent to which one has internalized moral objections to it, such that evading mere illegality will be characterized by winking lucidity, but when one has internalized an understanding that quid pro quos are immoral, structural evasion will be characterized by Bourdieu's "twofold truth." For instance, Dr. Weiner's indignant differentiation between a sugar baby and a hooker seems primarily oriented toward his own self-image as someone who does not pay for sex, and the legal exculpation this provided was an unanticipated windfall (Balko 2009). Similarly, transactional sex as gift-exchange practices in Malawi is subjectively understood by men and women as courtship (Poulin 2007). Wide-ranging comparative analysis is necessary to understand under what conditions and to what extent parties to an obfuscated exchange subjectively

understand it as an exchange, and whether they even share the same understandings as their interaction partners (Glaser and Strauss 1964; Lainer-Vos 2013).

A related issue is the opinions of third parties to an obfuscated exchange. Much like the transactants, third parties have different options for viewing an interaction: they might internalize an understanding of it as not an exchange, perceive it as exchange but have the tact to suppress mention of it, or indignantly denounce it. We can understand these obfuscated exchanges as analogous to stigmatized people (Goffman 1963), but with the difference that the stigma primarily applies to the interaction and only by contagious extension to the participants. Just as some stigmatized people can pass, or are allowed to pass, so too might obfuscated exchanges. Even if such an interaction is understood as reputable, this meaning can best be understood as passing, and thus its standing is tenuous and discreditable. An obfuscated disreputable exchange is always at risk of being understood as *essentially* a disreputable exchange, particularly if a moral entrepreneur intervenes to discredit the discreditable (Adut 2008). The case of Dr. Weiner is again instructive, with the FBI aggressively investigating his sugar daddy relationships and making a serious attempt to discredit them as prostitution. Similarly, since the 1940s, *murabaha* has been the object of sustained critique by those in the “Islamic finance” movement, who discredit this legal fiction of bundling as being, in essence, a disreputable fixed rate of return on the principal, despite *murabaha*’s long tradition in sharia law (Kuran 2004). This effort at discrediting *murabaha* has met with widespread success; in recent decades, many pious Muslims (often with the encouragement of Muslim governments) have shifted away from *murabaha* and toward equity-based finance. We can imagine many other situations in which reputable but discreditable obfuscated exchanges are vulnerable to denunciation by moral entrepreneurs.

Thus far, I have discussed research questions closely related to moral drives and outcomes of obfuscation itself, but we can also ask how obfuscated exchanges differ from other forms of exchange or other forms of social ties. First, how does obfuscating an exchange change its properties as an exchange? When an interaction can be understood in etic terms as exchange, but in emic terms is understood quite differently, this would seem to render the calculability of exchange partial, if not necessarily entirely absent (Bourdieu 2000; Callon 1998). In reputable markets characterized by extreme product differentiation, the problem of calculability is usually solved through judgment devices (Karpik 2010), but to apply such a solution to obfuscated exchange would undermine the obfuscatory nature.¹³ Scaling up from the transaction to the market suggests the related question: How well are obfuscated exchanges described by price theory? As Block (2012:139) notes, nontrivial problems of information lead naturally to questions of relational work. In particular, obfuscated exchange is almost by definition a strong violation of assumptions of perfect information and low transaction costs. These effects may vary by the structure used; for instance, the anticipated calculation of a gift exchange’s value must include not only the value of a countergift but the likelihood that alter fails to reciprocate and there will be no countergift at all (Tulloch 1967). Moreover, when exchange is not structured as market pricing, it can be difficult to negotiate the terms of trade, as seen in the extreme case of villagers who found themselves unable to refuse a moocher’s incessant demands until they eventually killed him (Graeber 2011:116). This implies that markets characterized by obfuscated exchange will not follow the predictions of economic theory as smoothly as, say, the market in soybeans. We have some suggestive but mixed evidence from other markets that nontrivially violate the assumptions of economic theory. Experimental markets with imperfect information and inexperienced traders are still remarkably efficient at reaching theorized predictions (Smith 1962). Yet, the narcotics market is characterized by extremely furtive exchange and exhibits such anomalies as long-run violations of the law of one price (Kleiman 1992; Reuter and Caulkins 2004).

Tiebout competitions (where local public services are bundled with housing) also render calculability somewhat opaque, and the empirical literature on the efficiency of such markets is decidedly mixed (Brueckner 1979; Hoyt and Rosenthal 1997). Conclusively identifying the implications of obfuscating exchange for economic efficiency is beyond the scope of this paper, but most likely there is a trade-off, with taboo mitigation going up and economic efficiency going down as a function of the exchange's opacity.

Obfuscated exchange has implications not only for exchange as exchange but also for how social interactions scale up into social networks. Network structure is shaped by the cultural meaning attached to it; for example, the general principle of triadic closure means A and C are likely to meet if they are both close friends of B, but not if A and C are B's wife and mistress (Fuhse 2009). Whereas *quid pro quo* exchanges are often and ideal-typically arm's length, the reliance on tacit understandings in obfuscated exchanges should, all else being equal, lead a transactant to continue dealing with a partner who acts in accordance with the implicit terms of trade, rather than risk that the next partner will be obtuse and, for instance, not reciprocate a gift exchange properly. Obfuscation should increase repeat collaboration, a crucial issue for network formation and innovation (Guimerà et al. 2005; Uzzi and Spiro 2005). Moreover, use of brokerage as exchange obfuscation helps explain the puzzle of how brokerage can remain a stable structure over repeated transactions (Stovel et al. 2011). The structural obfuscation of exchange thus has implications for network formation heuristics. This is significant as previous research shows how small variations in micro-level heuristics lead to the emergence of dramatically different social structures (e.g., Bearman, Moody, and Stovel 2004; Guimerà et al. 2005; Martin 2009). Indeed, in some countries, ubiquitous transactional sex is structured as gift exchange (Dunkle et al. 2004; Poulin 2007). If many women are willing to identify as the girlfriend of a generous boyfriend, but few as a prostitute, then for transactional sex to be framed as gift exchange rather than *quid pro quo*, the network will need a higher mean and lower variance for degree among women and lower homophily between men and women for centrality, age, and seropositivity. These microlevel heuristics will scale up to dramatically different emergent network structures and public health outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This article discussed how the relational work that goes into ameliorating exchange taboos can involve not only rhetorical framing or symbolically loaded prices, as described in much previous research (Anteby 2010; Quinn 2008; Velthuis 2003; Wherry 2008; Zelizer 1978), but complicated exchange structures—bundling, brokerage, and gift exchange—that partially obscure the disreputable exchange. Bundling is when actors engage in differentiated ties but cross-subsidize across circuits. In effect, bundling allows the exchange of profane for sacred while maintaining the pretense that profane goods are exchanged only for profane and sacred goods only for sacred. Brokerage is when an intermediary handles the commensuration of profane and sacred. This allows at least one primary party to the exchange to maintain the premise that no taboo circuit has been formed. Gift exchange is when reciprocity is asynchronous or in-kind. This allows exchange to be framed as gifts made to express the social bond rather than deferred compensation for earlier transfers that may or may not be directly commensurable. These uses of structure as relational work often occur in combination, as with VIP bottle service that involves brokerage and bundling and with *payola* that involves brokerage and gift exchange. We even see all three forms simultaneously, as revealed in the divorce of Neil Bush (one of president George W. Bush's brothers) (Graeber 2011:127). Bush's trading partners sent prepaid prostitutes to his hotel room. The sex was

bundled together with legitimate exchange, the trading partners served as brokers who handled compensation for the sex, and the sex was a gift to Bush that he could tacitly reciprocate through more favorable trading terms. Together, this allowed Bush to remain agnostic as to whether he was having sex with prostitutes or was just a guy who happened to live in an alternate universe operating according to the laws of pornographic fantasy.

Actors may arrange these complicated exchange structures for reasons other than obfuscating taboo circuits, and their multiple purposes facilitate individual and collective denial that actors are engaged in exchange. If the only reason to structure exchanges as something other than *quid pro quos* was to obfuscate transgression, then obfuscated exchanges would ultimately fail in this regard, just as a scarf over the face would make an effective disguise in the snow but would look suspicious in summer. That is, the existence of alternative applications for complicated structures gives plausible deniability to suspicions that one is trying to obfuscate transgressions. Indeed, as described earlier, each exchange structure has important applications for reputable exchange. Bundling often lowers transaction costs or facilitates price discrimination. Brokerage can bring together primaries with low-volume trades in the market. Gift exchange often cements social ties, with the gifts themselves being incidental. Because these exchange structures can serve purposes unrelated to the relational work of concealing taboo circuits, they are particularly effective when actors do use them to hide taboo exchanges. When obfuscatory strategies are institutionalized as routine taboo circumventions, however, this renders them suspect, much as “good [exculpatory] accounts acquire a bad name, being exactly what quick-witted offenders would come up with were they to offer false ones” (Goffman 1971:112). Such institutionalized circumventions are not automatically useless, but they are vulnerable to discrediting by hostile moral entrepreneurs, as seen in the perennial debates over *murabaha* (Kuran 2004).

Zelizer usually presents relational work as a more nuanced alternative to moralizing “hostile worlds” on the one hand and reductionist “nothing but” on the other (Zelizer 2000). In contrast, this paper emphasizes how circuit structures can be used as relational work in a way that is not an alternative to “hostile worlds” or “nothing but” but, rather, is their synthesis. Specifically, we can draw from the “nothing but” perspective that many social interactions are, in an ultimate sense, about exchange. Nonetheless, members of a culture perceive certain circuits as “hostile worlds” and, crucially, this understanding extends to participants to the exchange themselves, who may feel constrained not only by the law or threat of ostracism but by their own moral commitments (Vaisey 2009). It is exactly this contradiction between actors’ desire to make an exchange and their recognition that the exchange is taboo that leads them to engage in elaborate relational work to obfuscate the taboo exchange, even to themselves. Doing so allows actors to engage in the exchange while avoiding sanction from third parties, reproaching oneself as a taboo violator, or spoiling the premise that the alter has nonpecuniary motives. Gifts and other structural alternatives to *quid pro quo* make exchange “viable and acceptable by facilitating self-deception, a lie told to oneself, as the condition of the coexistence of recognition and misrecognition of the logic of the exchange” (Bourdieu 2000:192).

Nonetheless, to say there are structures through which we circumvent exchange taboos does not mean these taboos do not exist: the very act of structuring work-arounds implies deference to a taboo’s authority. “When people sneak across the boundary of the sphere of money, they advertise the existence of the boundary” (Walzer 1983:98). If we conceive of morality as a dual process between explicit moral reasoning and moral intuition, then open moral reasoning to justify taboo violations does far more to undermine the taboo’s long-run strength than does paying it lip service but quietly circumventing it (Haidt 2012; Vaisey 2009). We can see this most obviously in contrasting Christianity’s theological justification

of interest against Islam's long-standing obfuscation of interest through *murabaha*. The Reformation-era Christian apologetic for interest was so successful that almost all Christians treat the taboo on interest as a mere historical curiosity, whereas Islam's consistently expressed (if widely flouted) belief that in principle one may not charge points on principal has allowed the *riba* taboo to smolder so that in recent decades the spark remained to be stoked to a healthy flame by fundamentalist moral entrepreneurs (Kuran 2004; Nelson 1969). Hence, as Rochefoucauld said, "hypocrisy is the tribute that vice renders unto virtue" (Rochefoucauld 2007 [1665]: 27), and we might add that in the absence of more forthright obeisance, virtue can be sustained by this hypocritical tribute.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author is grateful to Ari Adut, Nina Bandelj, Alan Fiske, Alice Goffman, Dan Lainer-Vos, Oliver Schilke, Stefan Timmermans, and Viviana Zelizer.

FUNDING

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research benefited from National Science Foundation Award Number SES-0724914 and a Sloan Foundation Industry Studies Fellowship.

NOTES

1. The relational work tradition has mostly been concerned with such issues as the commensuration of money with sexuality, death, and human tissues (Almeling 2011; Anteby 2010; Quinn 2008; Zelizer 1978, 2005), but people also feel moral reservations about exploitation. Sandel (2000) describes this schema of objections as "corruption" (sacred/profane commensurations) and "coercion" (exploitation). For elaborations on taboos premised on coercion, see Munger (2011), Satz (2010), and Walzer (1983).
Note that corruption and coercion are not always clearly distinguishable, especially when we have an initial disgust reaction to sacred/profane corruption, which we justify post hoc through explicit moral reasoning about exploitative coercion (Haidt 2001). For instance, we might feel disgusted by prostitution as a transgression of sanctity, but when forced to make a case against it, we might articulate a harm concern about exploitation of sex workers, sexually transmitted disease, or subjugation of women as a class. Moral philosophers in the liberal tradition often categorically reject concerns about sacred/profane commensuration for purposes of normative ethics or public policy and will legitimate such concerns only to the extent they can be justified in terms of harm or fairness (e.g., Satz 2010). Whatever the merits of such a view as an ethical or policy principle, it is orthogonal to the empirical point that, for better or worse, many people do in fact feel disgust at degradation of the sacred (Haidt 2012; Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010).
2. The human egg market provides an interesting case because "the fertility center staff mak[e] deliberate efforts to create a relational package that classifies the economic transaction as a gift for which donors receive compensation, rather than as direct sale of eggs" (Haylett 2012:230). The exchange is explicitly contractual; from the perspective of this article, the egg market is structurally a quid pro quo that involves code switching to elaborate rhetorical framing as a gift. Similarly, diaspora bonds are structured as explicit contractual debt offerings (albeit with some unusual terms, like contingency on achieving sovereignty), but the moral framing (i.e., ethnic solidarity) and price (i.e., failure to price in an appropriate risk premium) play up gift framing between the diaspora creditor and the nation (Lainer-Vos 2013). As anyone who has seen World War II propaganda can attest, similar properties characterize war bond drives to a state's own citizens.
3. Note that the specially protected role varies considerably and is not always, for instance, "the customer" (i.e., the person who gives profane and receives sacred). In political corruption, the legislator (who sells sacred legislation) probably engages in more self-deception than the rent seeker (who buys it), whereas in a '49 dance hall, the hostess (who sells sacred affection) probably engages in less

self-deception than the guest (who buys it). We can even see variation within a single phenomenon over time; for example, in the early 1980s, record executives could be naive about payola, whereas by the 1990s, it was radio programmers who engaged in considerable self-deception (Ahlkvist and Faulkner 2002; Dannen 1990). The one fairly consistent role is that of brokers, who by virtue of arranging the exchange are especially likely to be calculative toward it.

4. In some cases, a structure can completely eliminate a taboo, but this impeccable reputability is exactly what makes these cases unsuitable for expository purposes. For instance, it seems like trolling or willfully obtuse contrarianism to describe the differences between marriage and prostitution as “not fundamental” (Posner 1992:131) and even more so to proceed from that premise to describe marriage as an institution for overcoming the taboo against commensuration of sex and money.
5. There are similar prohibitions in Deuteronomy, but for the last few centuries, Jews and Christians have abandoned this taboo on the basis of a loophole in Deuteronomy 23:20 as well as other Biblical passages that describe interest favorably, such as Matthew 25 (Nelson 1969). Note that usury is often understood as objectionable on grounds of coercion or exploitation of those with weak alternatives (Munger 2011; Satz 2010). In this sense, usury taboos deviate from my general understanding of exchange taboos as restrictions on commensuration of sacred and profane. However, note that in Islamic jurisprudence, as in Thomist Christian theology and canon law, the objection to debt is often framed as involving a taboo commensuration that is objectionable because the creditor is understood to be getting something for nothing, and not just because the vulnerable debtor might be exploited. That is, whereas modern Western criticisms of debt, as seen in the Occupy movement, are understood primarily with reference to exploitation of debtors, this framing is not culturally universal, and the taboo against *riba* is arguably as much about commensuration as exploitation.
6. Efficiency arguments for bundling involve things like economizing on transaction costs, transportation costs, or economies of scale. For instance, a car is a bundle of parts and labor, but it is more efficient to buy a car assembled at the factory than to buy auto parts and hire a mechanic to assemble them. Bundling can also serve as price discrimination when a seller who wields market power increases total revenues (and decreases consumer surplus) by pricing only bundles rather than à la carte products, a common business model in the entertainment industry (Crawford 2007; Elberse 2010; Stigler 1963).
7. Paying news sources is an ethical issue, not a legal one. There are no laws against it, and tabloids do so routinely. Likewise, in Hollywood, it is accepted practice to pay the people who are dramatized in biographical films for their “life rights.”
8. The Abramoff affair illustrates why primaries may distrust brokers. One accusation against Abramoff was that he exploited his clients, and part of his plea agreement was to make restitution. Moreover, in a sort of second-order brokerage exploitation, Abramoff sometimes delegated brokerage between the Choctaw and Reed to Grover Norquist, and Abramoff was upset when Norquist retained more of the money than was originally agreed upon (Continetti 2006:154; U.S. Senate, Committee on Indian Affairs 2006:26–29).
9. The '49 dance hall and bottle service at contemporary nightclubs combine brokerage and bundling because payments to the broker are framed as the purchase of drinks. Pure brokerage, without bundling, would occur if hostesses were paid out of a cover charge and drinks were the usual price.
10. My discussion of status exchange through bundling follows Podolny's (2005) argument about status among large U.S. firms. In other contexts (e.g., pre-modern societies), status flows through patron-client gift exchange (Martin 2009; Saller 1982; Schwartz 2010).
11. “Pawning” is structurally similar to gift exchange but is framed differently; debt is explicit in pawning but tacit in gift exchange. It is debatable whether pawning is best understood as a distinct structure or just a special case of gift exchange, but given this article's emphasis on structure over framing, I tentatively treat pawning as a corollary form. In pawning, ego gives something of profane value (often money) to alter in exchange for an *explicit* contractual debt. (Note the explicit nature of debt in pawning contrasts with the tacit obligation of gifts.) When alter is unable to repay the debt, ego demands forfeiture of collateral, which would otherwise be sacred. In effect, one might be unwilling to sell sacred goods outright but find it permissible to stake sacred goods as collateral and then default (Graeber 2011). Note that pawning exchanges almost always occur under conditions of desperation, and the nature of the collateral reflects this. For instance, in many societies, one can pawn dependents or one's own person and then default on the insurmountable debt and fall into slavery. This allows

subjective distinctions like those expressed by the mother of a bond slave prostitute who “claims not to have sold her daughter, but only to have accepted a loan” (Bishop and Robinson 1998:214). A more genteel form of pawning occurs when museums stake art as collateral, even though more direct routes to deaccessioning are frowned upon as a violation of donor intent. Similarly, Constantinople did not simply sell the crown of thorns to France but (while under great threat from the Turks) pawned the Passion relic to Venetian bankers and then saw the bankers sell it to France when Constantinople was predictably unable to redeem the loan.

12. Bourdieu (1990) describes delay, and the longer the better, as key to distinguishing gift exchange from *quid pro quos*. However, careful reading shows Bourdieu is ultimately interested in uncertainty and trust, with delay being a mechanism for making trust harder to sustain and therefore more important. Although Bourdieu is clearly correct that gift exchange *often* involves delay, in some forms of gift exchange, like tipping and Greco-Roman euergetism, gift and counter-gift remain sequential but reciprocity can be immediate.
13. For instance, we can imagine a sugar daddy website that includes reviews of past dates and even summary metrics aggregating across these dates. To the extent this would make salient information typical of conventional courtship, it would not undermine the obfuscatory nature of the exchange. However, to the extent this information renders calculable tacit prices, it would make the website seem more like a disreputable prostitution service and less like a reputable dating site.

REFERENCES

- Adut, Ari. 2008. *On Scandal: Moral Disturbances in Society, Politics, and Art*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Ahlkvist, Jarl A. and Robert Faulkner. 2002. “‘Will This Record Work for Us?’: Managing Music Formats in Commercial Radio.” *Qualitative Sociology* 25:189–215.
- Almeling, Rene. 2011. *Sex Cells: The Medical Market for Eggs and Sperm*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Anteby, Michel. 2010. “Markets, Morals, and Practices of Trade: Jurisdictional Disputes in the U.S. Commerce in Cadavers.” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 55:606–638.
- Balko, Radley. 2009. “Feds Bust Doctor for . . . Meeting Women on the Internet.” *Hit & Run: Reason Magazine*. Retrieved January 18, 2014 (<http://reason.com/blog/2009/09/04/feds-bust-doctor-for-meeting-w>).
- Bearman, Peter S., James Moody, and Katherine Stovel. 2004. “Chains of Affection: The Structure of Adolescent Romantic and Sexual Networks.” *American Journal of Sociology* 110:44–91.
- Benedict XVI. 2005. “Deus Caritas Est.” Retrieved January 18, 2014 (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html).
- Bielby, William T. and Denise Bielby. 1999. “Organizational Mediation of Project-Based Labor Markets: Talent Agencies and the Careers of Screenwriters.” *American Sociological Review* 64:64–85.
- Biscotti, Dina, William B. Lacy, Leland L. Glenna, and Rick Welsh. 2012. “Constructing ‘Disinterested’ Academic Science Relational Work in University–Industry Research Collaborations.” *Politics & Society* 40:273–308.
- Bishop, Ryan and Lillian S. Robinson. 1998. *Night Market: Sexual Cultures and the Thai Economic Miracle*. New York: Routledge.
- Block, Fred. 2012. “Relational Work in Market Economies Introduction.” *Politics & Society* 40:135–44.
- Bohannan, Paul. 1955. “Some Principles of Exchange and Investment among the Tiv.” *American Anthropologist* 57:60–70.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bruce, Jan K. 1979. “Property Values, Local Public Expenditure and Economic Efficiency.” *Journal of Public Economics* 11:223–45.
- Burt, Ronald S. 1992. *Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Callon, Michel. 1998. *The Laws of the Markets*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers/Sociological Review.

- Carrier, James. 1991. "Gifts, Commodities, and Social Relations: A Maussian View of Exchange." *Sociological Forum* 6:119–36.
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius. 1926. *Philippics*. Translated by W. C. A. Ker. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius. 1967. *On Moral Obligation*. Translated by J. Higginbotham. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coase, Ronald H. 1979. "Payola in Radio and Television Broadcasting." *Journal of Law and Economics* 22:269–328.
- Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Continetti, Matthew. 2006. *The K Street Gang: The Rise and Fall of the Republican Machine*. New York: Doubleday.
- Crawford, Gregory S. 2007. "The Discriminatory Incentives to Bundle in the Cable Television Industry." *Quantitative Marketing and Economics* 6:41–78.
- Cressey, Paul. [1932]2008. *The Taxi-Dance Hall: A Sociological Study in Commercialized Recreation and City Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dannen, Fredric. 1990. *Hit Men: Power Brokers and Fast Money Inside the Music Business*. New York: Times Books.
- DiMaggio, Paul J. 1977. "Market Structure, the Creative Process, and Popular Culture: Toward an Organizational Reinterpretation of Mass Culture Theory." *Journal of Popular Culture* 11:433–51.
- Douglas, Mary. 1966. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Dunkle, Kristin L. et al. 2004. "Transactional Sex among Women in Soweto, South Africa: Prevalence, Risk Factors and Association with HIV Infection." *Social Science & Medicine* 59:1581–92.
- Ehrlich, Isaac. 1996. "Crime, Punishment, and the Market for Offenses." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10:43–67.
- Elberse, Anita. 2010. "Bye-Bye Bundles: The Unbundling of Music in Digital Channels." *Journal of Marketing* 74:107–23.
- Fernandez-Mateo, Isabel. 2007. "Who Pays the Price of Brokerage? Transferring Constraint through Price Setting in the Staffing Sector." *American Sociological Review* 72:291–317.
- Fisher, Marc. 2007. *Something in the Air: Radio, Rock, and the Revolution That Shaped a Generation*. New York: Random House.
- Fiske, Alan Page. 1992. "The Four Elementary Forms of Sociality: Framework for a Unified Theory of Social Relations." *Psychological Review* 99:689–723.
- Fiske, Alan Page and Philip E. Tetlock. 1997. "Taboo Trade-Offs: Reactions to Transactions That Transgress the Spheres of Justice." *Political Psychology* 18:255–97.
- Freeman, Linton C. 1977. "A Set of Measures of Centrality Based on Betweenness." *Sociometry* 40:35–41.
- Fuhse, Jan A. 2009. "The Meaning Structure of Social Networks." *Sociological Theory* 27:51–73.
- Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss. 1964. "Awareness Contexts and Social Interaction." *American Sociological Review* 29:669–79.
- Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Goffman, Erving. 1971. *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gould, Roger V. 2002. "The Origins of Status Hierarchies: A Formal Theory and Empirical Test." *American Journal of Sociology* 107:1143–78.
- Graeber, David. 2011. *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. New York: Melville House.
- Granovetter, Mark S. 2007. "The Social Construction of Corruption." Pp. 152–72 in *On Capitalism*, edited by V. Nee and R. Swedberg. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Guimerà, Roger, Brian Uzzi, Jarrett Spiro, and Luís A. Nunes Amaral. 2005. "Team Assembly Mechanisms Determine Collaboration Network Structure and Team Performance." *Science* 308:697–702.
- Haidt, Jonathan. 2001. "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment." *Psychological Review* 108:814–34.
- Haidt, Jonathan. 2012. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. New York: Pantheon Books.

- Hanson, Robin. 2007. "The Policy Analysis Market (A Thwarted Experiment in the Use of Prediction Markets for Public Policy)." *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization* 2:73–88.
- Hayek, F. A. 1945. "The Use of Knowledge in Society." *American Economic Review* 35:519–30.
- Haylett, Jennifer. 2012. "One Woman Helping Another Egg Donation as a Case of Relational Work." *Politics & Society* 40:223–47.
- Henrich, Joseph, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan. 2010. "The Weirdest People in the World?" *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 33:61–83.
- Hirsch, Paul M. 1972. "Processing Fads and Fashions: An Organization-Set Analysis of Cultural Industry Systems." *American Journal of Sociology* 77:639–59.
- Hoyt, William H. and Stuart S. Rosenthal. 1997. "Household Location and Tiebout: Do Families Sort According to Preferences for Locational Amenities?" *Journal of Urban Economics* 42:159–78.
- Jancsics, David. 2013. *A Friend Gave Me a Phone Number: Brokerage in Low-level Corruption*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Karpik, Lucien. 2010. *Valuing the Unique: The Economics of Singularities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kleiman, Mark. 1992. *Against Excess: Drug Policy for Results*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kolhatkar, Sheelah. 2010. "The News Merchant." *The Atlantic*, August 11, 2010. Retrieved January 18, 2014 (<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/09/the-news-merchant/8194>).
- Krawiec, Kimberly D. 2009. "Show Me the Money: Making Markets in Forbidden Exchange." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 72(3):i–xiv.
- Kuran, Timur. 2004. *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lainer-Vos, Dan. 2013. "The Practical Organization of Moral Transactions: Gift Giving, Market Exchange, Credit, and the Making of Diaspora Bonds." *Sociological Theory* 31:145–67.
- La Rochefoucauld, François. 2007. Maxims. Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Marsden, Peter V. 1982. "Brokerage Behavior in Restricted Exchange Networks." Pp. 201–218 in *Social Structure and Network Analysis*, edited by P. V. Marsden and N. Lin. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Martin, John Levi. 2009. *Social Structures*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Mauss, Marcel. 1967. *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. New York: Norton.
- Molm, Linda D., Nobuyuki Takahashi, and Gretchen Peterson. 2000. "Risk and Trust in Social Exchange: An Experimental Test of a Classical Proposition." *American Journal of Sociology* 105:1396–1427.
- Munger, Michael C. 2011. "Evoluntary or Not, Exchange Is Just." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 28:192–211.
- Nelson, Benjamin. 1969. *The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pinker, Steven, Martin A. Nowak, and James J. Lee. 2008. "The Logic of Indirect Speech." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 105:833–838.
- Plutarch. 2001. *Plutarch's Lives*. Translated by J. Dryden, edited by A. H. Clough. New York: Modern Library.
- Podolny, Joel. 2001. "Networks as the Pipes and Prisms of the Market." *American Journal of Sociology* 107:33–60.
- Podolny, Joel. 2005. *Status Signals: A Sociological Study of Market Competition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Polk, Charles, Robin Hanson, John Ledyard, and Takashi Ishikida. 2003. "The Policy Analysis Market." Pp. 272–73 in *Proceedings of the 4th ACM Conference on Electronic Commerce*, Vol. 9. New York: ACM Press. Retrieved January 18, 2014 (<http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?doid=779928.779994>).
- Posner, Richard A. 1992. *Sex and Reason*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Poulin, Michelle. 2007. "Sex, Money, and Premarital Partnerships in Southern Malawi." *Social Science & Medicine* 65:2383–93.
- Quinn, Sarah. 2008. "The Transformation of Morals in Markets: Death, Benefits, and the Exchange of Life Insurance Policies." *American Journal of Sociology* 114:738–80.
- Reuter, Peter and Jonathan P. Caulkins. 2004. "Illegal 'Lemons': Price Dispersion in Cocaine and Heroin Markets." *Bulletin on Narcotics* 56:141–65.
- Rossmann, Gabriel. 2012. *Climbing the Charts*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Saller, Richard P. 1982. *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Sandel, Michael J. 2000. "What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets." *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 21:87–122.
- Satz, Debra. 2010. *Why Some Things Should Not Be for Sale: The Moral Limits of Markets*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schwartz, Seth. 2010. *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Scott, James. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Smith, Vernon L. 1962. "An Experimental Study of Competitive Market Behavior." *Journal of Political Economy* 70:111–37.
- Stigler, George J. 1963. "United States v. Loew's Inc.: A Note on Block-Booking." *Supreme Court Review* 1963:152.
- Stovel, Katherine, Benjamin Golub, and Eva Meyersson Milgrom. 2011. "Stabilizing Brokerage." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 108:21326–32.
- Stovel, Katherine and Lynette Shaw. 2012. "Brokerage." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38:139–58.
- Taddeo, Lisa. 2010. "Rachel Uchitel Is Not a Madam." *New York*, April 4, 2010. Retrieved January 18, 2014. (<http://nymag.com/news/features/65238/>)
- Torgler, Benno. 2007. *Tax Compliance and Tax Morale: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Tullock, Gordon. 1967. "The Welfare Cost of Tariffs, Monopolies, and Theft." *Economic Inquiry* 5:224–32.
- U.S. Senate, Committee on Indian Affairs. 2006. "Gimme Five": *Investigation of Tribal Lobbying Matters*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Uzzi, Brian and Jarrett Spiro. 2005. "Collaboration and Creativity: The Small World Problem." *American Journal of Sociology* 111:447–504.
- Vaisey, Stephen. 2009. "Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 114:1675–1715.
- Velthuis, Olav. 2003. "Symbolic Meanings of Prices: Constructing the Value of Contemporary Art in Amsterdam and New York Galleries." *Theory and Society* 32:181–215.
- Waldinger, Roger, Chris Erickson, Ruth Milkman, Daniel Mitchell, Abel Valenzuela, Kent Wong, and Maurice Zeitlan. 1998. "Helots No More: A Case Study of the Justice for Janitors Campaign." Pp. 102–119 in *Organizing to Win*, edited by K. Bronfenbrenner, S. Friedman, R. W. Hurd, R. A. Oswald, and R. L. Seeber. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.
- Walzer, Michael. 1983. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. New York: Basic Books.
- Weitzer, Ronald. 2009. "Sociology of Sex Work." *Annual Review of Sociology* 35:213–34.
- Wherry, Frederick F. 2008. "The Social Characterizations of Price: The Fool, the Faithful, the Frivolous, and the Frugal." *Sociological Theory* 26:363–79.
- Wherry, Frederick F. 2012. "Performance Circuits in the Marketplace." *Politics & Society* 40:203–21.
- Wright, Evan. 1999. "Dance with a Stranger." *LA Weekly*, January 20, 1999. Retrieved January 18, 2014 (<http://www.laweekly.com/1999-01-28/news/dance-with-a-stranger/>).
- Yandle, Bruce. 1983. "Bootleggers and Baptists: The Education of a Regulatory Economist." *Regulation* 7:12–16.
- Zelizer, Viviana A. 1978. "Human Values and the Market: The Case of Life Insurance and Death in 19th-Century America." *American Journal of Sociology* 84:591–610.
- Zelizer, Viviana A. 1994. *The Social Meaning of Money*. New York: Basic Books.
- Zelizer, Viviana A. 2000. "The Purchase of Intimacy." *Law & Social Inquiry* 25:817–48.
- Zelizer, Viviana A. 2005. *The Purchase of Intimacy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zuckerman, Ezra W. 2004. "Do Firms and Markets Look Different? Repeat Collaboration in the Feature Film Industry, 1935–1995." Unpublished manuscript (http://web.mit.edu/ewzucker/www/look_different.pdf).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Gabriel Rossman is an associate professor of sociology at the University of California-Los Angeles. His research interests include the production of culture and economic sociology. He recently published *Climbing the Charts: What Radio Airplay Teaches Us About the Diffusion of Innovation* (Princeton University Press 2012).