

ETHNIC AND RACIAL STUDIES

# Responses to Stigmatization in Comparative Perspective

Edited by  
Michèle Lamont and Nissim Mizrachi



# Responses to Stigmatization in Comparative Perspective

Multiculturalism and diversity have raised a number of challenges for liberal democracy, not least the stigmatization of people in response to these developments. In this book, leading experts from a range of disciplines look at the responses to stigmatization from the perspectives of ordinary people. They use a range of case studies drawn from the US, Brazil, Canada, France, Israel, South Africa, and Sweden: the first systematic qualitative and cross-national exploration of how diverse minority groups respond to stigmatization in the course of their everyday lives.

The chapters in this book tackle a range of theoretical questions about stigmatization, including how they make sense of their experiences, how they shape subsequent behaviour, and how they negotiate and transform social and symbolic boundaries within a range of social and institutional contexts.

*Responses to Stigmatization in Comparative Perspective* provides new data and analysis of how stigmatization affects a range of societies, and its original research and analysis will be important reading for students of Ethnicity, as well as Sociologists, Political Scientists, and Anthropologists. This book was originally published as a special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

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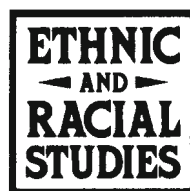
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# Responses to Stigmatization in Comparative Perspective

*Edited by*

**Michèle Lamont and Nissim Mizrachi**

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Graziella Moraes D. Silva and Elisa P. Reis

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## Chapter 3

*African Americans respond to stigmatization: the meanings and salience of confronting, deflecting conflict, educating the ignorant and 'managing the self'*

Crystal M. Fleming, Michèle Lamont and Jessica S. Welburn

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*Participatory destigmatization strategies among Palestinian citizens, Ethiopian Jews and Mizrahi Jews in Israel*

Nissim Mizrahi and Hanna Herzog

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Crystal M. Fleming

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*Folk conceptualizations of racism and antiracism in Brazil and South Africa*

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# Ordinary people doing extraordinary things: responses to stigmatization in comparative perspective

Michèle Lamont and Nissim Mizrahi

## **Abstract**

This special issue offers a first systematic qualitative cross-national exploration of how diverse minority groups respond to stigmatization in a wide variety of contexts. This research is the culmination of a coordinated study of stigmatized groups in Brazil, Israel and the USA, as well as of connected research projects conducted in Canada, France, South Africa and Sweden. The issue sheds light on the range of destigmatization strategies ordinary people adopt in the course of their daily life. Articles analyse the cultural frames they mobilize to make sense of their experiences and to determine how to respond; how they negotiate and transform social and symbolic boundaries; and how responses are enabled and constrained by institutions, national ideologies, cultural repertoires and contexts. The similarities and differences across sites provide points of departure for further systematic research, which is particularly needed in light of the challenges for liberal democracy raised by multiculturalism.

## **Why this special issue? Why now?**

There is a growing body of social science research on how members of ethno-racially stigmatized groups understand and respond to stigmatization, exclusion, misrecognition, racism and discrimination.<sup>1</sup> Building on this literature, this special issue offers a panoramic view of how everyday responses to stigmatization contribute to the transformation of group boundaries across a range of national contexts. We present

new research that broadens and consolidates an emerging theoretical agenda. This research is the culmination of a coordinated study of stigmatized groups in Brazil, Israel and the USA, as well as of connected research projects conducted in other sites (Canada, France, South Africa and Sweden).

Our point of departure is Goffman (1963), who shows how individuals with discredited or 'spoiled' identities take on the responsibility of managing interaction to prevent discomfort in others while preserving their own sense of self-worth. Feelings of stigmatization can be routine or traumatic and triggered by specific events – just as racism can be perceived as ongoing or situation-specific (Williams, Neighbors and Jackson 2008).

Everyday responses to stigmatization are here defined as the rhetorical and strategic tools deployed by individual members of stigmatized groups in reaction to perceived stigmatization, racism and discrimination.<sup>2</sup> While psychologists have considered how individuals cope with various types of stigma (Oyserman and Swim 2001),<sup>3</sup> they do not consider how these responses are associated with broader social factors – particularly with racial formation (Omi and Winant 1994) and the cultural repertoires that are variously available across contexts (Swidler 1986; Lamont and Thévenot 2000; Mizrachi, Drori and Anspach 2007). This concern with how cultural and structural contexts enable and constrain individual and group responses is one of the distinctive features of our contribution. Moreover, while social psychologists tell us that individuals cope with discrimination by privileging their in-group as the reference group (Crocker, Major and Steele 1998), we move beyond intra-psychological processes to study inductively a broader range of responses to stigmatization, and their relative salience, in meaning-making. Moreover, we deepen the analysis by showing the importance of national contexts and national ideologies and definitions of the situation in shaping responses to stigmatization.

Simmel (1971), Weber (1978b [1956]), and countless others, told us that group formation is a fundamental social process. It involves closure and opportunity hoarding (Tilly 1998), differentiation (Blau 1970), network formation (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Brashears 2006) and a number of other group processes (e.g. Fine 1979). While recent research focuses on the origins of group boundaries and particularly the role of the state in their formation (Wimmer and Min 2006), we are more concerned with how boundaries are accomplished through the unfolding of everyday interaction and the frames that ordinary people use, which interact with collective myths about the nation (Castoriadis 1987; Bouchard 2009). Thus, we consider how in various national contexts, defined by different histories of intergroup relations, collective myths and socio-demographic profiles, ordinary people claim

inclusion, affirm their distinctiveness, contest and denounce stereotyping and claim their rights in the face of discriminatory behaviour and other more subtle slights to their sense of dignity.

Despite (and because of) an abundance of historical and sociological studies concerning resistance (e.g. the role of religion in fostering resilience among African American women in the face of discrimination (Frederick 2003) or politicization among young Palestinian citizens of Israel (Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker 2005)), there is a need for more systematic and cumulative inquiry into responses to stigmatization. Following everyday experiences and everyday practices enables a fresh dialogue about society from the perspective of marginalized groups (Hooks 1990; Harding 1993; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002). Shifting the discussion to everyday life makes it possible to go beyond a rigid approach to the binary distinction between public and private, and to analyse everyday practices of individuals as social sites for the transformation of social hierarchies. Choices made in everyday life form the politics of small things (Goldfarb 2006; Herzog 2009). At various times they may clash with or reinforce group boundaries as defined by public policies or state-sanctioned representations (e.g. see Bail 2008). Examining them more closely is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of the making and unmaking of group boundaries.

The time is ripe for the pursuit of these objectives. In the USA, the election of Barack Obama raised awareness concerning the transformation of stigmatized identities. Social scientists have asked whether this change signals a broadening of predominant definitions of cultural membership, as well as a heightened awareness of differentiation among blacks (opposing middle-class and ghetto blacks) (e.g. Bobo and Charles 2009; Kloppenberg 2010; Sugrue 2010). This election also became an important point of reference around the planet, as it triggered countless scholarly conversations and public debates about the place given to subordinated minority groups in national myths and political systems. It confirmed that the progress of African Americans is an unavoidable point of reference for minority groups elsewhere. Thus, this watershed election provided the occasion to examine more closely the constitution of racial and ethnic identity and group membership in a global context to complement a growing literature on the comparative study of racism and anti-racism.<sup>4</sup>

### **Shared theoretical background**

The papers included in this special issue share several points of departure concerning racial identification and group formation. First, following Jenkins (1996) on social identity, we understand the latter as resulting from both self-identification (e.g. what it means for African



Americans to belong to this group) and group categorization (the meaning given to this group by out-group members) (see also Cornell and Hartman 1997). Hence, understanding responses to stigmatization requires considering the formation of collective identities: how ‘us’ and ‘them’ are mutually defined, and how individuals and groups engage in boundary work in responding to stigmatization, both in private (when they ruminate about past experiences and how to make sense of their experiences) and in public (when they interact with others while reacting to specific events or incidents). However, in contrast to Jenkins’ earlier formulations, we are inspired not only by social psychology, but also by the growing literature in cultural sociology that considers cultural repertoires (the cultural ‘supply-side’), as well as the conditions that make it more likely that members of groups will draw on some rather than other strategies available in their cultural toolkits in formulating their responses (e.g. Lamont 1992). National contexts make various kinds of rhetorics more or less readily available to social actors (e.g. ‘market’ versus ‘civil’ rhetorics in France and the USA (Lamont and Thévenot 2000)), as our comparative analyses of responses to stigmatization reveals. We explore whether and how references to such repertoires are present in working-class and middle-class destigmatization strategies.

Second, together with Todd (2005), Wimmer (2008), Brubaker (2009) and others, we are concerned not only with social identity but also with identification processes and the development of groupness. However, we are centrally concerned not only with cognition but also with the role of emotion (particularly anger, pain, pride and other feelings directly associated with identity management – see Archer 2000; Summers-Effler 2002; Collins 2004; Bail 2011). As will be evident to the reader, there are wide variations in the extent to which ethno-racial categories are consolidated and salient across contexts; these influence whether respondents will readily interpret their experience of inter-group relationships through ethno-racial or other lenses. We also connect the drawing of group boundaries to everyday morality (e.g. Lamont 2000 and Sayer 2005, in the case of class). We are concerned with the self and the extent to which ready-made racial and ethnic identities, as compared to other markers (gender, religion, class or nationhood), are available for individuals when constructing their personal identity.

Third, we consider social identity and group formation in the context of state or national ideology and collective history. These operate as cultural structures that constrain and enable different views of the self (Giddens 1984), including group identity. While other classical contributions to comparative race relations remain more exclusively focused on political ideology and state structures (e.g. Marx 1998; Lieberman 2005) or elite discourse (e.g. Van Dijk 1993;

Eyerman 2002),<sup>5</sup> some of the papers included in this issue (e.g. Mizrachi and Herzog) connect such ideologies to micro-level cultural orientations and actions of ordinary people, which continuously feed into the transformation of group boundaries. More specifically, we aim to connect the political level (definitions of the polity and of cultural membership) to individual strategies by showing how macro repertoires affect micro strategies in increasingly globalized contexts. In such settings, cultural referents such as the logic of rights, hip hop culture, the black power movement and anti-Americanism are becoming more salient as tools for self-definition across national cases.

### **Methodological and conceptual approaches**

Whether implicitly or explicitly, most of the papers included in this special issue embrace the methodological standpoint that the juxtaposition of cases and the use of an inductive, bottom-up approach can reveal unanticipated racial conceptualizations (Morning 2009) and responses to stigmatization that would otherwise remain invisible. We also focus on national cases where inter-group boundaries are more or less porous, policed or crossable, so as to consider the impact of the permeability of boundaries on responses – and eventually draw generalizations about the relationship between racial regime and anti-racist strategies (Lamont and Bail 2005). Again, we show that some responses are more likely in some contexts than in others, being enabled by distinct cultural repertoires. For instance, Afro-Brazilians use the metaphor of ‘racial mixture’ to affirm their national belonging by invoking blurred racial symbolic boundaries (Silva and Reis in this issue); and Mizrahi Jews contest discrimination in ways that do not threaten their position as legitimate members of the Israeli polity, drawing on and reinforcing a definition of group membership that is based on shared religion (Mizrachi and Herzog in this issue). These papers show how different cultural repertoires (e.g. the national myth of ‘racial mixture’ in Brazil or the Zionist melting pot ideology in Israel) are mobilized by individuals to make claims concerning their moral worth, membership and similarity (or even superiority) to majority group members. Finally, situating responses to stigmatization in various national contexts highlights the singularity of the American case, where the level of distrust toward the white majority is particularly high and where ‘confronting’ is the majority response among African Americans interviewed.

New developments in cognitive sociology, cultural anthropology and cultural psychology (D’Andrade 1995; DiMaggio 1997; Schweder, Minow and Markus 2002) have opened up novel theoretical as well as methodological avenues for research. These have yet to fully penetrate research in the field of immigration, ethnicity and citizenship. Too often

this literature remains committed to the use of a broad concept of relatively coherent 'ethnic culture' that downplays internal group differences, overlooks hybrid cultural practices and emphasizes shared values transmitted by parents or national contexts. In contrast, cultural sociologists have proposed a range of analytical tools such as 'repertoire', 'symbolic boundaries', 'frame' and 'narrative', to capture with greater specificity a variety of cultural processes. These tools are being applied to the study of the role of culture in the reproduction of poverty (Lamont and Small 2008; Harding, Lamont and Small 2010). They are also put to use in a number of more recent American studies concerning racial and ethnic identity (Patillo-McCoy 1999; Small 2004; Lacy 2007; Morning 2009; Warikoo, forthcoming; for a review, see Skrentny 2008).

We locate responses to stigmatization within a broader general sociology of classification and folk understandings about equality, with how members of stigmatized groups understand their cultural specificity and differences, and their relative positioning in the world. Furthermore, we view boundary work, meaning-making and folk classification as relating to ordinary people's daily management of heterogeneity and similarity within and between groups. Analytical devices, such as boundary work, commensuration and orders of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991; Espeland and Stevens 1998; Lamont and Molnár 2002), can be mobilized to capture similarities in and differences between how ordinary people think about universalism, difference and particularism, among other concepts.

### **Intellectual and social significance**

The theoretical significance of the project lies beyond its contribution to the development of a general grounded theory of responses to stigmatization. It also contributes to several literatures by opening new vistas in the study of anti-racism. First the philosophical literature on the politics of distribution and recognition (Taylor 1994; Fraser and Honneth 2003) and communitarianism (Walzer 1997; Sen 1998) has considered neither how non-elite individuals from stigmatized groups cope with the challenge of creating equality, nor the place of universalism and multiculturalism (or particularism) in this process.<sup>6</sup> Second, social scientists working on social movements, such as the American civil rights movement (McPherson 1975; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001) or worldwide nationalist movements and anti-racist non-governmental organizations (Omi 1993), have yet to explore how the frames promoted by social movements connect with the everyday anti-racist strategies of ordinary people (also Hobson 2003). Our project will help to create this bridge, by looking beyond the confines of social movements to study recognition struggles in the context of

'boundary-making activities' (also Wimmer 2008). Third, while the literature on anti-racism is undergoing a shift from a philosophical focus (e.g. Taguieff 1991) to a focus on anti-racist practices (e.g. Lentin 2004), recent scholarship has established that states vary widely in their 'culturally responsive policies' toward minority groups. Such policies apparently affect the extent to which groups direct their efforts toward specific institutions when claiming recognition and rights (Modood 1997; Kymlicka 2004). We also contribute to the study of cultural citizenship (Ong 1996; Bodemann and Yurdakul 2006) and citizenship regimes (Jenson and Phillips 2002) in connection with models of inclusion (Hall and Lamont 2011).

### **Contributions**

Taken together, the studies in this issue provide a systematic analysis of how minority groups cope with stigma in a variety of national contexts. We now frame each of these papers to provide a wider and more integrative account of what they teach us about group identity formation and responses to stigmatization.

### **A bottom-up comparison of responses to stigmatization**

At the centre of this special issue is a three-way parallel comparison of responses to stigmatization strategies among members of ethno-racial minority groups in Brazil, Israel and the USA. These three cases were selected to maximize the differences in perceived discrimination across cases, the latter being an indicator of the strength or permeability of boundaries across national contexts. The selection was based on a comparison by Lamont and Bail (2005) of the relative strength of social boundaries in various realms (labour market, spatial segregation, etc.) as well as that of symbolic boundaries (pertaining to collective identity) across half a dozen countries. We hypothesized that *overall*, perceived discrimination, and by extension, the range and salience of anti-racist strategies, would be greater for Muslim Palestinian citizens of Israel than for *negroes* in Brazil, for whom interracial sociability and interracial sexual relationships are relatively frequent. We viewed the American case as an intermediary one, one where racism would be very salient, but also one where inter-group boundaries would be weaker than in Israel, with different patterns of responses.

The papers on these three national cases that are included in this issue are not explicitly comparative – the comparison is fleshed out in a collective book in preparation. However, each was developed against the background of the other cases. When read against each other, these cases provide a diverse panorama of responses to stigma as well as an