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Published by: The University of Chicago Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/682023
Accessed: 18/08/2015 06:35

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The Sound of Stigmatization: Sonic Habitus, Sonic Styles, and Boundary Work in an Urban Slum

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Based on focus groups and interviews with student renters in an Israeli slum, the article explores the contributions of differences in sonic styles and sensibilities to boundary work, social categorization, and evaluation. Alongside visual cues such as broken windows, bad neighborhoods are characterized by sonic cues, such as shouts from windows. Students understand “being ghetto” as being loud in a particular way and use loudness as a central resource in their boundary work. Loudness is read as a performative index of class and ethnicity, and the performance of middle-class studentship entails being appalled by stigmatized sonic practices and participating in their exoticization. However, the sonic is not merely yet another resource of boundary work. Paying sociological attention to senses other than vision reveals complex interactions between structures anchored in the body, structures anchored in language, and actors’ identification strategies, which may refine theorizations of the body and the senses in social theory.

The world is rarely silent: most activities produce cognizable sounds. People vary in the sounds they produce and in the ways they experience, evaluate, and react to sounds; places, too, vary in their real and imagined sonic profiles, yet sociologists rarely listen to most of these differences.

I am grateful to Michèle Lamont, Jennifer Silva, Béatrice De Gasquet, Nissim Mizrachi, Sigal Gooldin, Orna Sasson-Levy, the members of the Harvard Culture and Social Analysis Workshop, and the AJS reviewers for their highly thoughtful and useful comments on former drafts of this article. These comments improved the article significantly.

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0002-9602/2015/12101-0005$10.00

AJS Volume 121 Number 1 (July 2015): 205–42 205
More than a century ago Georg Simmel urged sociologists to engage in a sociology of the senses, as the senses mediate social interactions, the building blocks of social life. Through sensory perception interaction parties gain knowledge of, classify, and evaluate one another and make impressions on and evoke emotions in one another. While different senses produce qualitatively different impressions and knowledge, they all deserve sociological attention (Simmel [1907] 1997, pp. 109–20). The role of the senses in evaluation is most conspicuous in the urban contexts that interested Simmel most, where spaces are shared by dense heterogeneous populations of strangers. However, in the following century Simmel’s call has hardly been followed: urban sociology—like the general sociological research on racial relations, class, and social identities—directed its gaze toward visual markers of identity and difference, while neglecting sonic ones. While many contemporary social scientists and historians criticized the privileging of vision (Howes 1991; Jay 1994; Bailey 1996; Smith 2000; Sterne 2003; Pinch and Bijsterveld 2012), this article attempts to empirically explore the largely ignored significance of sounds as markers of social identity and difference.

Below I demonstrate how sonic differences may socially matter. I do so by exploring the boundary work of student renters in a low-status Israeli neighborhood adjacent to a university campus. I ask two main empirical research questions: first, I explore how perceived differences in sonic styles and habits are used by students as resources while drawing symbolic boundaries against local residents—which sounds and sonic practices are laden with social meaning and why? I compare the salience of sonic difference in the boundary work of students to the salience of other available...
resources and explore the associations students make between sonic styles and social identities and the meanings they ascribe to sounds and sonic practices. The second research question is whether “bad neighborhoods” are marked by sonic cues comparable to the visual cues identified by the urban sociology literature, and if so, which sonic practices are stigmatized to such a degree that they may stain a neighborhood?

I also use my empirical data to contribute to the debate on the body’s role in sociological theory. Sounds are always experienced through the sensing body (which mediates the physiological, emotional, and moral responses they evoke) and in many cases are also produced by human bodies. They act on our body while pleasing or jarring and while shaping our sense of place. If perceived sonic differences indeed inform the evaluation of people and places, we should explore the role of socialized bodies in shaping these perceptions.

Bourdieu is famous for locating culture and social structure within the socialized body. Bourdieu’s body is a medium of the social, shaped by one’s structural location and further shaping social reproduction and homophily through its group-specific embodied dispositions, bodily techniques, and schemes of action and evaluation. This perspective suggests that both the production of sounds and the evaluation of and reaction to sounds may be guided by social structure in ways that are mostly unconscious and unreflective. Pragmatist cultural sociologists alternatively conceptualize the body as a container of multiple skills, styles, and codes that actors may master, select, and switch flexibly and strategically depending on the situation (Carter 2003; Swidler 2003), whereas still others view the late modern body as a site of (and raw material for) reflexive projects of self-transformation and identity formation rather than a site and medium of social reproduction (Giddens 1991).

Empirically studying sonic styles, experiences, and evaluation may allow us to explore the complex interactions between embodied dispositions and reflexivity, and between embodied social structures and cultural discursive structures (as discursive knowledge often influences sense experience), and thus help us push forward the debate on the body in social theory (Shilling 2003). In this point the sonic is more helpful than the visual, as the latter has been considered ever since Aristotle the “highest,” least corporeal sense (Smith 2007), thus inviting semiotic accounts of visual cues that ignored the body altogether.

Below I demonstrate how sounds inform social classification, evaluation, and stigmatization of both people and places and how they are mobilized

in boundary work. I show that sonic performances (dis)qualify actors as members of certain groups, since enacting class and ethnic identities entails group-specific sonic styles and sensibilities. The corporeality of sonic experience endows these social boundaries with an emotional charge. I also demonstrate that intergroup differences in sonic styles represent different attitudes toward space and create a clear sonic profile of “bad neighborhoods” and their population. Finally, I show that perceived sonic differences are produced by the complex interaction between bodily habits and sensibilities (the sonic habitus), discourses and collective representations that reproduce sonic stereotypes, and identification strategies employed by actors. Thus, studying sound may contribute to the sociological study of space and neighborhoods, class and ethnic identification, and sociological theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Seeing and Hearing Social Identities

Contemporary sociological theory suggests that differences matter socially only if they shape classification and boundary work (the constructions, imagining, and negotiation of intergroup boundaries, similarities, and differences [Lamont and Molnar 2002; Tilly 2004]). This tradition understands social classification as relying not on objective essential commonalities and differences but rather on cognition (focusing on some perceived differences while disregarding others), social dynamics (performative acts like identification and positioning), and negotiation over boundary delineation (Barth 1969; Zerubavel 1991; Lamont 1992; Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004; Jenkins 2008; Wimmer 2008). This strategy enables studying social groups without committing the sin of methodological groupism (Brubaker 2002; Jenkins 2008). Similarly, the focus shifts from stigma (actual discrediting attributes that actors try to hide; Goffman 1963) to “stigma processes” or “stigmatization” of groups and characteristics, processes that are embedded in power relations and moral worldviews and produce discrimination (Link and Phelan 2001; Yang et al. 2007).

The literature shows that social classification and stigmatization often rely on visual markers such as skin color, clothing, and countenance that enable people to see class, race/ethnicity, and lifestyles (Mazur 1993; Crane 2000; Glenn 2009; Brekhus et al. 2010). For Loftland (1973) urbanites usually classify strangers “by simply looking” at them and at their surroundings; sonic identity markers are never discussed. For interactionists sonic norms are part of the interaction order, and their breaches indicate lack of deference and demeanor (Goffman 1956; Vannini et al. 2010), yet they do not consider them identity markers that classify actors, as sonic incivilities
are associated with certain situations, not with certain actors (see also Smith, Phillips, and King 2010).

While sociologists identify an increasing silencing of public spaces ever since the 19th century, these trends are similarly portrayed as universal and unmarked (Sennett 1977, pp. 205–18; Vannini et al. 2010, p. 342). This is peculiar since manners and habits are generally viewed as embodied inherited status cues (Bourdieu 1984, pp. 70–73) and since passing remarks and anecdotes in the literature indicate that there are multiple competing sonic norms and that some groups are perceived as louder than others. The gentrification literature often mentions tensions over the perceived noisiness of gentrified populations and the attempts of gentrifiers to enforce sonic discipline, but these remain passing remarks (Roessner 2000; Pattillo 2007, pp. 265, 288; Graves 2008; Betancur 2011). Similarly, references to loudness and noise, including loud rap music and shouts, are scattered throughout Anderson’s work (mainly associated with “street” identity but occasionally also with the “descent” poor; Anderson 1999), but this dimension is never isolated or theorized. Historians show that sonic stereotypes of the vulgar loudness of ethnic minorities and the working class have contributed to their dehumanization and pathologization (Bailey 1996; Bijsterveld 2001; Smith 2003; Vaillant 2003). Yet, sociological research does little to explore whether these symbolic identifications still persist and explore how they shape contemporary social boundaries—the few exceptions include Kuipers (2006) on the aversion of Dutch middle-class educated circles to joke telling (rejected for its perceived working-class “loudness”) and Morris (2007) who shows how teachers classify poor Afro-American girls as “ghetto” for being loud (see also Ginwright 2000, p. 92). This article attempts to fill this lacuna: I demonstrate that at least in some contexts people also hear class and ethnicity just as they see them, and I explore the social semiotics of sounds and sonic practices and the way sounds laden with meaning are used as resources in boundary work.

Seeing and Hearing the Ghetto

Sound is similarly underrepresented in the sociological study of the categorization of spaces. Exploring the criteria employed in lay classifications of neighborhoods as “ghettos” or “slums” is an important sociological project, even if we avoid (Small 2008) or strictly delimit (Wacquant 2008) the use of “ghetto” as a reified analytical category. The literature shows that stigmatization of populations and spaces often follow each other, giving rise to complex interrelationships between social and spatial boundaries. While neighborhoods are often stigmatized because of racist and classist biases against their residents, once stigmatized, “bad neighborhoods” (and their stigmatized characteristics) can discredit their residents.

The sociological research of urban spaces has explored carefully the contribution of stereotypical visual markers of “bad” neighborhoods (such as garbage on the streets, graffiti, and broken windows) to neighborhood stigmatization, urban decline, crime, and mental health risks (Krase 1979; Wilson and Kelling 1982; Sampson and Raudenbush 2004; Haney 2007; Sampson 2009). The social efficacy of these visual cues derives from their legibility (as indexes of moral values or threat) and hence depends on the perceiver’s sensibilities (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). Scholars increasingly acknowledge the cognitive, constructed, semiotic, and contextual dimensions of spatial hierarchies and neighborhood stigmatization (Gieryn 2000, p. 472; Sampson and Raudenbush 2004; Davis 2009; Sampson 2009), yet hierarchies of both people and places are still viewed as mainly visual, as urban sociology suffers from the same ocular-centric bias as the sociology of identities. For Gieryn (2000), place-sensitive sociology means sociology done in a visual key, an urge fully followed by the development of sophisticated visual research methods like systematic social observation, which turns social reality into a silent movie. However, if what counts is people’s perception of place, there is no theoretical justification for a priori privileging the eye: other senses may also inform neighborhood perception and spatial categorization. Sonic cues may have similar effects to visual ones, as indicated by the correlation between noisy neighbors and perceived neighborhood crime (Quillian and Pager 2001). Below I compare the relative salience of visual and sonic cues that characterize “bad” neighborhoods.

DATA AND METHODS

This study focuses on student renters in two adjacent census subquarters of Unitown considered a single neighborhood, Mixbury (both names are pseudonyms). Its population in 2008 was 14,100, with high rates of both manual workers (35%) and students (25.5% were 20–29-year-olds, mainly students). Built in the late 1950s, Mixbury soon gained the reputation of a slum. Over the years, more fortunate residents have left and were replaced by new generations of poor immigrants (mainly from the former Soviet Union) and, since the 1990s, increasingly by student renters. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Mizrahim (Jews of Middle Eastern/North African descent) are significantly overrepresented compared to Israel’s general population, according to census data. As elsewhere, the takeover of residential neighborhoods by students has evoked tensions between students and the local residents (Smith 2005; Hubbard 2008; Alfasi et al. 2011), who
differ on most sociodemographic variables. Mixbury’s unusual heterogeneity rendered differences and tensions highly conspicuous, thus making it a strategic site for studying boundary work. However, the sound-related patterns, norms, and discourses identified in Mixbury were also found in my data from other localities in Israel.

Mixbury mainly consists of two- to four-story, long apartment houses that are separated by (usually unkempt) empty yards and a few small “centers” with a few shops each (selling groceries, lottery tickets, pizzas, flowers, etc.) that serve both student renters and the local population. Neighbors also meet one another on the streets, as the vast majority of households are without a car. Density levels are typically low (20–25 housing units per acre).

This article relies on 85 interviews and two focus groups with 44 Mixbury residents and 53 Israelis from other localities, supported by hundreds of data items from online sources. It consists of five distinct data sets.

Data set A.—This first data set consists of in-depth interviews with 14 graduate and undergraduate students (23–27-year-olds) living in Mixbury, recruited through messages posted on student Internet discussion forums and snowballing. Interviewees were first asked about the neighborhood, their neighbors, and differences between Mixbury and their places of origin. At this stage, interviewers avoided direct reference to sound. Only later were interviewees explicitly asked about sounds in their lives and environment. This strategy was chosen to assess the actual (unprompted) salience of sonic differences in comparison to other resources that can be mobilized in boundary work.

Interviews were fully transcribed and coded for characterizations of the neighborhood, characterizations of local residents, characterizations of students, different symbolic resources mobilized in boundary work, sonic practices mentioned, student reactions to perceived noise nuisances, and arguments used while criticizing loud behaviors. This coding system was revised until proved exhaustive and coherent. It enabled me to construct typologies of stigmatized sounds and of the reactions to them, to survey the social meanings given to sonic practices, and to assess the salience of the sonic in the stigmatization of people and places.

The interview design, execution, and analysis took into account critiques against the interview method. First, interviews were analyzed while paying attention to emotional reactions of the interviewees (bursts of laughter while telling a story experienced as highly “bizarre” or “exotic” or being offended by certain questions, e.g., when asked whether they have ever called to anyone from the window, as if the answer is not obvious). This kind of data gives us access to what Pugh (2013) called the “visceral level,” the deeper level of embodied culture (despite claims that it cannot be accessed through interviews; cf. Vaisey 2009). Interviews can also help identify and characterize common discursive structures interviewees use.
in sense-making, while giving meaning to the actions of themselves and others, and assess the relative importance of different components in their boundary work (by asking open questions and paying attention to the salience of the sonic). Finally, interviews are a good way to collect a large set of concrete anecdotes that tell us both about the local storytelling culture (discussed below) and about the concrete articulations of discourses and sensory experiences that go way beyond “lay theory.”

Data set B.—This second data set consists of two focus groups with 12 undergraduate students living in Mixbury (23–28-year-olds). Some participants were friends or acquaintances (the density scores of the groups, i.e., the rate of intergroup ties that actually existed from all possible ties, were 0.38 and 0.65), which encouraged active participation and employment of preexisting group styles. Focus groups are complementary to interviews (Morgan 1996): while the latter encourage confessional revelation of idiosyncrasies, the former encourage engagement in intergroup interaction, social storytelling, consensus building, and employment of acceptable discourse (Hydén and Bülow 2003). Participants were first given a focusing exercise (Bloor et al. 2000): each participant had to write down three characteristics she likes and dislikes in Mixbury. Lists were then compared and discussed, and participants had to agree on a common list. This exercise was followed by discussion of key questions from the interview schedule. The facilitator first referred to sound during the last quarter of the meeting time only, to realistically assess the relative salience of sound and collect unprompted references to sound. The similarity between focus group data and interview data is important, because while interviews abstract discourse from natural interaction contexts, interaction in focus groups with high density scores may indicate actual group styles (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003).

These two main data sets were supported by three others.

Data set C.—This data set consists of references to Mixbury and its residents collected online from student discussion forums and from two websites dedicated to tenants’ reviews of their blocks and apartments (all 154 reviews on Mixbury blocks were examined). This set gave me access to unsolicited discourse in context. As young people shift much of their social interaction to online arenas, it leaves durable textual traces (Schwarz 2011, 2012) available for analysis. There is no epistemological reason not to integrate this rich, uninitiated data in social analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Hookway 2008). While accounts in sets A and B are more detailed and nuanced, their strong similarities with the unsolicited set C gives the findings stronger validity.

Data set D.—The fourth data set consists of 53 in-depth interviews conducted with Israelis from other localities. These interviews, conducted for a research project on sound and society among a nonrepresentative
but highly diverse sample (in terms of ethnicity, status/occupation groups, education level, lifestyle, geographic residence, and age [20–80]), enabled me to place the situation in Mixbury within a broader context and identify whether discursive formations, stereotypes, practices, and judgments were reactions to the Mixbury situations or patterns prevailing beyond the local context.

Data set E.—The final data set consists of interviews conducted by a research group headed by Nurith Alfasi with 18 Mixbury residents: 11 students and seven nonstudent residents. These interviews focused on the relations between Mixbury, the students, and the university.

The current study was designed to gain knowledge of the meanings high-status residents (students) attribute to sounds and the role sounds play in their boundary work vis-à-vis low-status residents (locals). The data contain good indications that nonstudents use different evaluation schemes to evaluate sounds and do not use sonic differences in the same way in their own boundary work, yet the important question of boundary work by disadvantaged groups (Lamont 2000; Paul 2011) lies beyond the scope of this article and remains for future research. All quotes throughout the article are excerpts from interviews and discussion groups, unless stated otherwise.

HOW TO SOUND SHCHUNA

The interviews started by asking interviewees to tell me about Unitown, Mixbury, and their neighbors and to compare Mixbury with their home-towns. These questions invited them to engage in boundary work. Interviewees mentioned both sonic and visual characteristics: most often they replied that Mixbury is dirty and nonstudent neighbors are loud. Dirt and loudness also emerged in the focus groups among Mixbury’s most disturbing features (alongside scary people, bad maintenance, and poverty). In both cases the references to sound were unprompted by the interviewer/facilitator. Visual characteristics included references to the neighborhood’s appearance in the “broken windows” tradition (poorly maintained houses and litter on the streets and in backyards, for which students held locals responsible), alongside a few references to the neighbors’ own sloppy or inappropriate appearance (“wearing pajamas all day long,” tacky jewelry and makeup, and their “dumb expression”).

However, the sonic clearly emerged as the most salient dimension in their accounts. Whereas interviewees do not constitute a representative sample, the unanimity on this point is noteworthy: 12 out of 14 interview-

4 To ensure maximal class, age, and ethnic diversity, interviewees were mainly recruited from the following four groups: classical orchestra subscribers, mainly upper-middle-class retirees; residents of a poor, nationally, and ethnically highly heterogeneous town; urban middle-class parents who moved to the countryside; and librarians.
ees referred to the noisiness of Mixbury and its residents (another one claimed her block was atypical in not being noisy), and 11 of them referred to this as a problem, while only seven referred to litter/dirtiness.\(^5\) Noise was also highly salient in the focus groups and even in block reviews, despite its transient and performative quality (unlike unpainted walls or piles of litter, sound does not endure beyond its performance). In these cases, loudness was not mentioned metaphorically but rather in references to concrete unwelcome sounds. For students loudness was indicative of low status, Mizrahi ethnicity, and occasionally also domestic violence, thus comparable to the visual cues discussed in the literature.

Class, ethnicity, and lifestyle are interrelated. In Israel, historical discriminatory policies in education, employment, and housing led to enduring underrepresentation of Mizrahim among the upper-middle class and cultural elites, although high intraethnic variance exists. This underrepresentation still persists: the ratio between Ashkenazim (Jews of European descent) and Mizrahim among university faculty is 1:10 (Blechman 2008), while their share in the general population is roughly similar. The chances of Ashkenazim’s going to college/university are 1.51 times higher than Mizrahim’s, and Ashkenazim are 150% overrepresented in the top income decile compared to Mizrahim, despite a significant decrease in the income gap (Dahan, in press). Early state establishment has also imagined Mizrahim as uneducated and uncivilized and in need of Westernization and constructed Westernness as a form of capital (Shohat 1988; Khazzoom 2008). Social boundaries between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim gradually grew permeable and nonsalient but have been reformulated as cultural boundaries based on ethnically marked classed habitus, behaviors, and cultural preferences. This boundary relocation (Tilly 2004) has admitted many Mizrahim into Israel’s mainly Ashkenazi hegemonic group, while retaining the stereotypical identification of Mizrahiness with lowbrow tastes and uncivil behavior. Mizrahi student interviewees also shared this notion, just as middle-class African-Americans often identify “authentic blackness” with “being ghetto” (Austin 2004). Similarly, only middle-class highly educated Ashkenazim are considered true representatives of “hegemonic Ashkenaziness” (Sasson-Levy 2008).

Keeping a safe distance from “biological” race/ethnicity, boundary work relies on the performance of racialized culture, including sound. Class, culture, and ethnic categories (which overlap only partially) are used alternately and strategically, and ethnic Mizrahim are associated with or dissociated from culturally “Arsim” at will (Mizrachi and Herzog 2012).\(^6\) Thus, \(^5\) Litter is, however, not purely visual: participants also mentioned its olfactory dimension. \(^6\)“Arsim” is a pejorative slur, directed at those allegedly epitomizing a stereotypical Mizrahi lowbrow lifestyle.
one interviewee described her neighbors as “behavior-wise Mizrahim,” partly dissociating ethnicized culture from hereditary ethnicity (“not all Mizrahim are like this”; see also Sasson-Levy 2008). For her, “behavior-wise Mizrahim” meant loud and prone to yelling: in performing class and ethnicity, sonic style emerged as a crucial factor.

While discussing their neighbors, participants drew a sharp distinction between students and nonstudents—whom they portrayed as poor, lazy, uneducated, uncivilized, inconsiderate, exotic/eccentric “characters,” and Mizrahim. Class and ethnicity are significant axes that organize identities in Israel. However, for students Mizrahiness and poverty were not merely ascriptive categories: students strongly emphasized their performance in everyday practices and interactions through what they usually called “being shchuna.” The Hebrew word shchuna (literally “a neighborhood”) is colloquially used as an adjective denoting behaviors and lifestyles associated with “bad” neighborhoods, comparable to the English “being ghetto.” This popular sense of “ghetto” (distinguished from its strict structural sense; [Wacquant 2008]) connotes cheap and stigmatized tastes, behaviors, and lifestyles (Austin 2004, p. 55; Daniels 2007), which students found everywhere around them.

Stigmatized sonic practices and sounds emerged in the data as central components of being shchuna. While Mixbury was chosen for maximal heterogeneity in terms of age, class, and ethnicity, data set D demonstrates that identifying these practices with a low-status population is generally common in Israel. While other middle-class Israelis also reported encounters with stigmatic sonic practices, Mixbury students encountered these stigmatic sounds regularly in their own neighborhood and consequently used them more intensively in boundary work, as demonstrated below. As discussed below, this boundary work cast students into the unusual, almost paradoxical role of “the silent student,” as young students are themselves usually considered a “loud” population. The stigmatized shchuna sonic practices that emerged in the data may be subsumed under three main categories: shouts, unregulated sociality in a public space, and music. When explicitly asked about sounds typical of Mixbury, focus group participants also mentioned (alongside these three categories) sounds such as those of loud synagogue prayers on Saturday morning or fruit vendors hawking their wares. These are important components of the sensory experience of Mixbury’s soundscape. However, I chose to focus on those sounds used most intensively in boundary work as markers of social identity. Students characterized Mixbury as loud/noisy, yet it should be noted that noise and loudness are socially constructed categories for sonic practices that breach

7 In one focus group shchuna was also used positively to describe an old Israeli collectivist neighborhood spirit, extinguished by individualism.
hegemonic middle-class sonic norms, not to be confused with high-decibel sounds.

Shouts

The most typical noise interviewees associated with Mixbury in particular and *shchuna*-ness in general was shouting and loud speech. When Mixburians raise their voice in certain ways, it is often interpreted as indicating their inherent flaws that doom them to remain in the margins of society: as one interviewee suggested, Mixbury is populated by “people who are, like, you see that they don’t have too much means, like the means to get ahead, move to [a better neighborhood], and you see it by how they dress, how they behave, how they shout.” Another student said that unlike the temporary, immigration-related poverty of Russian emigrants, Mixburians are “poor for generations,” essentially defined by their “low socioeconomic condition. No manners, no education.” Question: I wonder how it is manifested. Answer: “It is manifested in noisiness, undoubtedly . . . they are used to talking in shouts.” Shouting and loudness were also ethnically marked. Mixbury students often mentioned the ethnicity of noise perpetrators (“Moroccans,” “Arabs,” “Arabo-Jews,” “Mizrahi ethnicities,” or the ethnically laden pejorative slurs “Arsim” and “Frehot”) as relevant information, reproducing the image of Arabs (Schwarz 2014) and Mizrahim as louder (sets A and C). This stereotype is not endemic to Mixbury: set D interviewees were well aware of it and often considered it valid. The identification of shouts with the poor similarly prevails nationwide.

References to loudness and shouts in the data included the following items.

*Shouting from a distance.*—Interviewees said that Mixburians often call one another from the window to the street or vice versa (“Come down!" “Is Danny home?”), even at night—be it mothers calling their children, children calling each other, or elderly people making plans. Neighbors from different buildings have entire conversations shouted from the window. Similarly, bus passengers communicate with drivers without leaving the rear seats. Even while quieting their neighbors, Mixburians are reported to shout “quiet” without leaving home. Interviewees qualified shouts from windows as “a *shchuna* sound,” which some reported not to have heard before moving there.

Students often felt discomfort with these practices, finding them undesirable or amusing (some actually burst into laughter while discussing them, e.g., “They yell from the window to each other, like, it’s, it seems to them. . . . I mean, that’s the way things are here. To me it didn’t seem reasonable [laughing]”). The students’ accounts indicate that this practice breached both their notion of one’s right to quiet and their sense of pri-
vacy (e.g., “I wouldn’t want anyone to know, to hear the conversations I have with friends, or what I need, what I want, and I know it annoys me to hear others [doing it]. Come on, call him, or get upstairs. Why do you shout?”).

As Sennett demonstrated (1977, pp. 205–18), the right to quiet—to be lost in one’s thoughts and daydreams free from sonic intrusions that would draw attention to the presence of others at public cafés or even in the street, not to mention one’s private home—is highly modern and emerged in the 19th century. This once aristocratic sensitivity has drifted down, yet my data demonstrate that it never became truly universal as assumed by Sennett and Goffman (1956) but remained an identity marker.

One interviewee suggested that “while living with flatmates, you try to be careful . . . that you don’t intrude into someone else’s aural range,” as by listening to loud music that could reach another room. “Intrusions” such as shouts of neighbors often qualify blocks as “bad” in reviews (set C). Unlike unwelcome sights (such as dirt), loud sounds can pass through walls and easily intrude on one’s most private space, the home (and since human ears have no lids, one cannot simply turn away from these intruding, unwelcome sounds; Simmel 1997, p. 115). As data set D indicates, at least some lower-class Israelis share neither this sensibility to sonic “intrusions” nor the belief in a right to quiet (thus, a poor mother of four children believed her children’s noise was natural and attributed neighbors’ anger to their Russian mentality). Mixbury students demonstrated discomfort with the lack of clear sonic boundaries between public and private spaces: one interviewee criticized a woman for shouting to her children “as if she were inside her home,” while another reported reproaching a local little girl who was calling her friend from downstairs, telling her: “Why should the whole neighborhood hear that you call Tehila?”

Shouting from the window is morally and socially laden also outside Mixbury. One interviewee told me she grew up in a poor neighborhood, yet her immigrant parents would not allow her to shout from the window like the other children: by declining the local sonic style, they resisted segmented assimilation into Israel’s lower strata. An academic living in a village told me she banned her daughter from answering when “her Mizrahi friends” called her from the road. Curiously enough, there are good indications that shouting from windows has become socially marked only recently, representing new sensibilities rather than intergenerational cultural reproduction. The only student who praised this practice described it nostalgically as a vestige of the collectivist spirit that once characterized

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8 Indications include uncritical references to the practice of shouting from windows in old films, songs, and books and intergenerational differences among interviewees. However, this issue requires further research.
Israeli neighborhoods. Contrariwise, the embodied sensibilities of most students represent an emerging highly individualistic middle-class habitus. A chemistry graduate who grew up in Unitown simultaneously distanced herself from this stigmatizing symbol of being *shchuna* and romanticized it: “I love the *shchuna*-ness in Unitown. I still love it. When I arrive here, I love being able to buy vegetables and pay two days later . . . and that when the neighbors call my mother from outside, they shout. It’s all right. But I can’t live like that” (set E).

Only one focus group participant admitted to having ever shouted from the window. One participant boasted of never having broken this taboo even when it could make sense (while seeing friends looking for her building right underneath her window, she still phoned them). Among the interviewees, shouting confessions were expectedly more common (five of 14). Others, however, reacted expressively: two burst into laughter, as they considered the very idea absurd. Two others raised their voice as if offended by the question and replied with firm statements: “No! Never!” or (interrupting the question) “Would I shout? No way! Like, is that what you’re asking? N-o! . . . it’s just not a manner of conduct that I respect, shouting. It’s disrespectful, it’s . . . I understand that’s the mind-set here . . . but I won’t do it. What is hateful to you, don’t do to your neighbor, that’s how I act.”

*Talking loudly.*—Students described Mixburians as talking too loudly even while standing near each other: “They just talk more loudly. It is generally typical of Mizrahim,” said one interviewee; a second noted that “the local populace shouts rather than talks,” while a third said Mixbury is characterized by “shouts, and a lot of them. . . . You can say exactly the same text in a lower volume, but they are simply unable to do so.” These loud voices emerged both from within apartments and from the streets. One student complained about the neighbor who wakes up the whole building while awakening her children with “screams of terror,” which qualified her as “very *shchuna*.” Students reported that loud utterances of locals often employed a “low” linguistic register and swearwords and were occasionally accompanied by vigorous (or “aggressive”) hand gestures, even in nonconflict situations.

Loud speech in itself instantiates lack of finesse and cultural capital: both Mixbury students and interviewees from other localities read it as indicative of low socioeconomic status, Mizrahi ethnicity, and lack of civility.9 Some interviewees tried to explain these differences as the result of class-specific

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9The historical roots of the identification of high-status groups with emotional self-control, restraint, and refined sensibilities are discussed in detail in the seminal work of Norbert Elias ([1939] 2000). While this pattern is somewhat complicated by later modern informalization processes (Wouters 2007), civility has still remained a major axiological principle in both Western and postcolonial societies. Cultural styles (including sonic styles) that are perceived to demonstrate lack of self-restraint and emotional control may deny actors of recognized social status. This remains true regardless of the important critiques on some
workplace conditions, family size, or (most often) “cultural differences.” Volume differences are thus consciously perceived and associated with social identities, and they inform social evaluation. However, loudness is not measured quantitatively in decibels: some communication styles are considered inherently loud (e.g., joke telling; Kuipers 2006). Differences in intonation between sociolects could have possibly also contributed to the perceived loudness of the locals.

Rows.—Raising one’s voice in conflicts is believed to tell even more about the perpetrators (i.e., is even more morally laden; Tavory 2011). As a dispute style, shouting connotes lack of self-control and even violence: it is much more physically engaged than middle-class tactics like relying on one’s symbolic capital or on soft, psychological management strategies acquired in the middle-class workplace (Illouz 2008) that embody antianger, conflict-avoiding, middle-class sentiments (Stearns and Stearns 1986; Baumgartner 1988). In Mixbury loud conflicts connote violence more than elsewhere, since they easily fit into stereotypical images of “problem neighborhoods”; hence, students often interpret ordinary sounds—crying babies (“and nobody soothes the ‘poor child’”) or domestic rows at night—as indicating domestic violence or neglect that may require police involvement.

As my data repeatedly demonstrate, loud conflicts are interpreted as class and ethnicity markers. Thus, a social worker (set D) identified yelling during conflicts with poverty, mental disorders, and Mizrahi ethnicity. Similarly, in research on ethnicity, an Ashkenazi interviewee confessed that despite her professed antiracism, while hearing two women screaming at each other in the supermarket “I immediately think they must be Moroccans from [a working-class town]” (Sasson-Levy 2008, p. 121).

Mixbury students often mentioned loud rows (especially domestic ones) and the “furious” voices of Mixburians. Some conflicts were criticized as pathological (cries attributed to allegedly battered children; parents yelling harsh statements, swears, and threats at their children), whereas others were viewed as normal but for the volume (“normal things that happen in every family, such as ‘do your homework,’ or ‘I don’t allow you to go to such-and-such place,’ only that they scream it, and . . . everyone hears”). In the latter case, Mixburians are denounced for shamelessness (they “air their dirty laundry,” so that “the whole street could hear” a couple’s inharmonious exchange), while of Elias’s assumptions, such as the existence of universal Freudian drives that may be either released or restrained, an assumption that enabled Elias to conceptualize cultural change on a unidimensional scale; the direct relation between interdependence chains’ length and civilization; or the unidirectional “trickle down” of civilization from European elites to lower strata in Europe and to colonized populations. Speech volume also may influence social evaluation unconsciously, like minor phonemic differences do (Labov 2006).

I thank an AJS reviewer for this insight.
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in the former they are denounced for their harsh, authoritarian, workingclass parenting style that does not abide by liberal, psychologically informed, middle-class norms (Kohn 1977; Lawler 2000).

In both cases Mixburians deviate from the middle-class ideal of harmonious domesticity—an anger-free haven (Stearns and Stearns 1986) or at least a site of verbal (rather than expressive) communication of emotions (Ilouz 2008). While shouts are not unusual in many middle-class families, Mixburians seem not to even bother hiding them, failing to evince public deference to this cultural ideal by being ashamed (as people who put claims to middle-class status would). Instead, they have loud rows out in the open, in a highly melodramatic style that reminded one interviewee of “Arab films.” Students often consider this behavior pathological. Thus, one student jokingly suggested that her neighbors (as a group) needed help from a TV coach who is famous for helping families live up to the therapeutic ideal: “We’ve all got accustomed to them yelling beneath our window ‘Yossi! Yossi! Come on!!! Why don’t you answer???” [and] to their shouts and fights with each other that can be heard from their apartments and from the street (me and my friend fantasize on inviting [an Israeli TV coach] to them, I wonder how he would have treated it)” (set C, Internet discussion forum).

For students, loud rows mark the difference between themselves and locals, as demonstrated by statements like “the whole building is populated by students, hence it’s very quiet, although in the opposite building there are a few families who love to shout at 4 a.m.” (set C). No wonder one interviewee changed to first-person plural while talking about a mother who shouted wildly at her toddler daughter, saying “this is not part of the values we were raised on.”

Social Interaction in Nondesignated Spaces

In a paraphrase of Mary Douglas’s classical definition of dirt as “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966), Peter Bailey (1996) suggested that noise is “sound out of place.” Sounds that would be legitimate were they not out of place constitute the second category of shchuna sounds. In particular, these are the sounds of sociability in public or semipublic spaces: sidewalks, buildings’ backyards, or parking lots.

The modern Western bourgeois organization of space consists of clear separations between public and private spaces and between different activity-specific designated spaces within each. This spatial organization, as developed since the 18th century, is highly culture specific: in India and Vietnam many streets constitute common spaces used for sundry activities such as cooking, bathing, urinating, sleeping, and unregulated peddling, norms that Western colonizers found hard to root out (Drummond 2000; Edensor 2006). Contrariwise, the literature portrays Western modern streets as “overdeter-
mined,” “strongly classified spaces,” where even social gatherings are unwelcome (Loftand 1973; Malone 2002; Edensor 2006). However, “Western” streets are far from being homogeneous in this respect, and spatial organization is often class specific. Thus, social gatherings on the semipublic front stoops are often considered a “ghetto” practice in the United States, and its ban in gentrifying areas is interpreted as directed against subsidized tenants and accommodating to gentrifiers (Roessner 2000, p. 268; Daniels 2007, p. 15; Graves 2008; Betancur 2011). In one Boston project, management’s gentrification efforts included both erecting fences between backyards to prevent gatherings in semipublic spaces and ordinances that prevented shouting from a distance over these fences (Graves 2008, pp. 106–8). In Chicago, middle-class residents regard parks as decorative elements to be watched from the car and consider their usage for sociability by working-class residents inappropriate (Pattillo 2007). In both Israel and the United States, improvised usage of public space and discomfort about it have similar class undertones.

Mixbury’s public spaces were used day and night for multiple social activities. Interviewees mentioned gatherings of friends and family, drinking coffee, listening to music from parked cars or cellphones, playing backgammon beneath the window or soccer on the parking lot, and having khaflot (parties—an Arabic word with clear ethnic pejorative connotations). While sometimes impressed by this warm sense of community, students were often concerned about the sounds of these activities, especially at night: sociability in Mixbury often takes place a few feet away from private apartments and may be easily heard from inside. By permeating walls, sound challenges the middle-class separation of public and private space: through sound, the community trespasses. Thus, a student (originally from an affluent small locality) mentioned

a common phenomenon of families or friends, who would get out to the street, sit on the curb, and spend their evening there, as if . . . I believe it’s because they have no park, garden or bench where they could sit normally and talk, so they sit on the curb, bring bottles of drinks, or someone would bring the car nearer and put on some loud music, and it becomes Saturday’s night entertainment, or on [weekday evenings]. . . . Students don’t [do it], on the street, it’s mostly families. And especially in the evenings, it starts to annoy, when you want some quiet at home, to rest and relax.

He never did anything about his annoyance, scared of being physically attacked (“you always hear the stories in the news”), yet one night his girlfriend (believing they would not hit a girl) asked them to turn the music down, which they did. Similarly, an online review described a block as “a mixture of a freak circus and a typical stereotype. Every Friday, in front of the entrance, two Arabs drink beer, listening to mizrahit [Middle Eastern pop] and spit through their teeth.”
For Sampson and Raudenbush, it seemed obvious to classify as a “disorder” any outdoor congregation of “three or more adults” while “not waiting for scheduled activities or business” (2004, p. 326), yet for many residents in working-class neighborhoods, this is where community life takes place. This represents not only community-oriented attitude and class-specific orientation toward public space (as a common good used for communication) but also material constraints: as Stinchcombe suggested, access to a sufficient amount of private space is a class privilege. Without it, many legitimate indoor activities must be moved outdoors, thus becoming an “illicit disorder” by middle-class standards (Stinchcombe 1963). Similarly, students believe locals should use their cellphones rather than shout, ignoring the unnecessary expenditure involved.

The sounds of children playing outside were also often mentioned as typical of Mixbury (experienced both negatively as a nuisance and positively as a nostalgic vestige). A relatively large share of families in Mixbury are large, and children play outside unattended by adults, unlike middle-class children who spend afternoons at home or in extracurricular activities (Lareau 2011).

Normative claims for sensory regulation of public space are inherently political questions about what and who should be audible and visible where and for the identity of space (Oosterbaan 2009; Adut 2012; Schwarz 2014). The strong classification of space into private spaces, where conversing and listening to music is considered appropriate, and public spaces, where relative quiet is enforced—taken for granted by students from “respectable” neighborhoods—does not hold in Mixbury. These conflicting attitudes toward public space and its sonic regulation are used while delineating symbolic boundaries.

Music

Mixbury hums with music, which is played in ways considered unacceptable by many students: local teenagers listen to music from their cellphones without headphones on buses or on the streets (“for the walking pace,” “like being inside a video-clip”). Interviewees reported that neighbors listen to loud music at night or before dawn (breaking noise regulations that forbid it between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m.) or with their front door open, letting the music pour over the stairwell. One practice interviewees stereotypically identified with uneducated Mizrahi/Arab hypermasculine men was listening to loud music from parked or moving cars (cf. Anderson 1999, p. 26).

Middle-class discontent with working-class music listening is as old as cheap gramophones and radios (Bijsterveld 2008), since sonic privacy has long been an emphatically middle-class ideal (cf. Gans 1982, pp. 20–21). Student interviewees criticized unregulated music listening as breaching
their right to quiet à la Sennett (“Once a person, for example, passes with his car playing loud music, he attracts all the sonic attention, and it’s disturbing. . . . Even if you just walk with your thoughts, it grabs part of your attention”).

However, interviewees were concerned not only about how locals listened to music but also about which music they played. As musical tastes are strongly stratified, loud music often characterizes spaces as belonging to certain groups, which may lead to conflicts in heterogeneous neighborhoods (Oosterbaan 2009; Schwarz 2014). Students often referred to the preference of nonstudent residents for lowbrow genres, strongly associated with lower-class and Mizrahi ethnicity. The genre most identified with Mixbury’s local residents is “heavy mizrahit” (the most stigmatized subgenres of Middle Eastern pop), which even culturally omnivorous students strongly disliked, following an anything-but-heavy-metal pattern (Bryson 1996). Trance music, heavy metal, and lowbrow hits were also occasionally mentioned. In Israel, preference for Middle Eastern pop is strongly and negatively correlated with both father’s status and Ashkenazi ethnicity (Katz-Gerro, Raz, and Yaish 2007). Interviewees strongly dissociated themselves from heavy mizrahit and ridiculed its whiny timbre and misery-stricken lyrics (“really heavy, as heavy as ‘father, why did you go? [laughing], you’ve left mom with the drugs and the debts’—no, it’s not really my taste”).

Some correlation exists between genres and ways of listening: in my data, music played from cellphones without headphones is usually reported to be mizrahit or trance music (whereas some “victims” joked online about retorting by blasting sophisticated jazz or medieval liturgical music: it is the mismatch between listening style and musical genre that made the joke effective). Playing loud music at home—unlike playing it outside—was also practiced by students. At this point students’ judgment is not quite impartial, for example, when interviewees admitted enjoying loud music played by student neighbors, while judging harshly loud lowbrow music played by locals.

Interpretations, Judgments, Reactions

While most students have problematized the soundscape of Mixbury (presenting it as one of the main things they dislike about living there) and employed a shared discursive framework to construct this soundscape as indicative of poverty, violence, and backwardness (their common notion of shchuna sounds), students still varied greatly in how they reacted to these unwelcome sonic behaviors. The repertory of these reactions (termed somatic alignment strategies by Vannini et al. [2010]) includes avoidance (studying in the library, leaving home whenever neighbors organize loud karaoke, masking domestic rows of neighbors with music), ignoring (conflict aversion occasionally nurtured by fear of being yelled at “as they do between themselves” or
attacked. This fear is not necessarily founded, as students who reported fear could not recall actual cases of violent reactions by locals, yet this construction of danger has significantly shaped social interaction, filing *police complaints, revenge* (“I decided that when in Morocco, I’ll do as the Moroccans do. So when he turned up the volume, I knocked [on his wall] with a broom—horrible, I know—and at 7 a.m., when I woke up, I played him some Spears and Aguilera”), or simply *asking for quiet* (these requests were sometimes accepted but sometimes refused as perpetrators claimed their right to produce loud sounds). Another common coping strategy, beyond the situation level, is *exoticization* of neighbors, turning nuisance into a source of amusement.

Students also varied in the moral responsibility they ascribed to loud locals. For some, loudness signified moral deficiency and disrespectful inconsideration. For others, it simultaneously denied locals of both social worth and moral responsibility (“They are nice people. [They helped me when I needed them.] They are really not bad people. It’s simply that they are beasts”). Still others claimed locals were simply unaware of disturbing others, quasi lacking intercultural skills. Whereas all aforementioned interpretations and coping strategies strengthened symbolic boundaries, not all of them equally promoted hostility.

**SOCIAL BOUNDARIES AND SONIC BOUNDARIES**

The shared notion of what *shchuna* sounds like is a stabilized cultural structure prevailing nationwide, as indicated by set D. However, to understand why the engagement of only some neighbors in stigmatized practices was generalized to Mixburians as a social category and why it mattered so much to students, we must explore more closely group constructions and group relations in Mixbury. This section explores social boundaries in Mixbury and suggests that the cultural structure portrayed above was mobilized by students in boundary work to bolster symbolic boundaries against locals, legitimize them, and load them with affect.

People often construct neighborhood boundaries as boundaries between social groups (Elias and Scotson 1965; Campbell et al. 2009), and segregative patterns that map to natural boundaries like main streets (Grannis 1998) give them good reason to do so. However, in Mixbury social and spatial boundaries do not overlap. Students have high symbolic status and often come from middle-class families, but at this life stage they command little financial capital, which draws them to Mixbury. As a group (intragroup variances aside), they differed from the nonstudent population in sundry variables including age, social class, lifestyle, education, and ethnic composition. The incongruence between spatial and social boundaries in Mixbury posed a challenge to student renters. Sharing a stigmatized space (slum)
with stigmatized groups threatened their sense of social place, their spatio-social positioning. These circumstances are most prone to racial prejudice (Blumer 1958) and, more generally, intensive demarcation of group boundaries.

Students demarcated boundaries in both their deeds and their speech. One central strategy in their boundary work was exoticization: students often compared themselves to anthropologists or tourists, for whom the bizarre peculiarities of Mixbury and its “natives” (as students called them) were a source of amusement. Even the very few positive references to Mixburians contributed to their othering and exoticization: these focused on their alleged authenticity (e.g., “it’s like when you’re on a holiday you go search for the place of the natives”) or nostalgically praised their long-foregone Israeli spirit of collectivism (turning student renters into time travelers). While students in the focus groups described it positively (“there’s something typically Israeli and beautiful about it”), they also reflected on their own accounts as “sounding a bit, I do not want to say orientalist, but a bit condescending”; in their accounts, Mixbury’s authenticity and collectivism were positively evaluated as internal goods that carry high intrinsic value, yet they were tainted by their lack of external exchange value, by being identified with people of low social status and hence class markers (on the relative independence of internal/use and external/exchange value, see Sayer [2005]). Students exchanged stories about exotic Mixbury “characters,” often focusing on their loudness (the single mother who screams at her children; the man who shouts on call-in radio programs). They thus turned nuisance into collective lore, performing difference as a source of amusement while demonstrating their general disdain for the locals. Focus group participants exchanged such stories and referred to famous stories known to all, while interviewees told me exoticizing stories and reported exchanging them with friends. Interviewees also exoticized trivial events: even a baby’s cry was exoticized by stressing its regularity (he cried daily at midnight; hence, students called him “midnight baby,” commenting it could happen “only in Unitown”). Thus, while comparable patterns of sonic boundary work exist elsewhere in Israel, the extreme heterogeneity of Mixbury clearly intensified it.

Nonstudent residents are far from being a homogeneous group: they include pensioners and single mothers, drug addicts and skilled industrial workers, fresh renters and indigenous Mixburian homeowners. However, the social maps students drew were consistently dichotomous, us versus them (e.g., “if there were really only locals, it would probably look exactly like the stigma”), without making finer distinctions. Focusing on Mixbury’s “minority of the worst” of loud eccentric characters as representative of the whole group through “emotional generalization” (Elias and Scotson 1965) obviously contributed to boundary delineation and to the discursive construction of Mixburians as loud.
While most students shared buildings with nonstudents, they often talked about themselves as living in “the students’ bubble,” as if they and the locals were living in “two different worlds.” These were not merely representations: in the terms of Lamont and Molnar (2002), the boundaries between students and nonstudents were not merely symbolic (subjective categorizations) but social boundaries that constitute closure. Most interviewees and focus group participants stressed that neither they nor other students have any social ties with locals, repeatedly saying “we don’t want to mix with the local population.” Students usually visited students-only pubs and clubs, where nonstudents are not allowed.12 They often switched to the first-person plural while talking about their relations with nonstudents: they understand their personal experience as nothing but a group experience. Some students who participated in social projects were not sure whether they should “show [locals] how they should live” also in everyday life contexts, for example, when locals shout at their children. Some students believed locals “aren’t very nice” or reported fearing them—either concrete fears of being shouted at, assaulted, or sexually harassed or abstract fears (“their body language or appearance may be a little scary”). Some suggested that the hostility was mutual, and locals used “student” as an insult.

Only a tiny minority reported having had interactions with locals.13 One student told me she had had a few brief conversations with a drug-addicted neighbor, but once he suggested that he join her and her friends, she blantly replied “Are you serious?” telling him they had nothing in common. Another student was invited to a young neighbor’s birthday: she declined but felt that this very interaction demonstrated her liberal “worldview” that “the fact they aren’t students doesn’t mean I cannot talk with them.” This network structure may help reproduce cultural differences (curtailing diffusion of sonic and other norms and practices), while perceived cultural differences help reproduce network structures (further discouraging intergroup contacts), a mutual constitutiveness already identified by social theorists (Pachucki and Breiger 2010; Vaisey and Lizardo 2010).

Students could mobilize endless differences in their boundary work, yet they chose to use sonic differences as a central resource. Sonic styles are neither the source of social boundaries in Mixbury nor their organizing criterion. Students had known that Mixbury is a stigmatized slum before moving there and had to differentiate themselves. Social boundaries between students and nonstudents are about class (background and aspirations) and ethnicity, taste, culture, and religiosity (indeed, students first mentioned

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12 Interviewees often mentioned students-only venues. Whereas ethnic discrimination in admittance is illegal, demanding that patrons present student IDs is a common practice.
13 An exception was a Mizrahi student who grew up herself in Unitown and used this fact to build trust and neighborly relations with her local neighbors.
noise and dirt, but later in the interview they also mentioned other differences, like Mixburians’ substandard language, parenting style, religiosity, and contempt for environmentalism). However, the sonic dimension contributed to existing boundaries in two important ways. The first is legitimation: while bare attributive categorization may easily be considered racist, arbitrary, or simply unfair performances of *shchuna*, allegedly uncivilized behavior (e.g., shouting from windows), supply students with cultural justifications for their categorization. Symbolic boundaries are thus used to rationalize and legitimize social boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002, p. 186).

Second, beyond mere legitimization of ethnoclass distinctions, sensory experience endows these distinctions with a strong moral and emotional dimension of aversion. Paying attention to the sensory dimension of social life is important exactly because people are usually not disengaged, Linnaean taxonomists. Their categorizations are invested with affect. While describing the sounds of their neighborhood and neighbors, interviewees laughed in embarrassment and seemed shocked and overwhelmed by the practices they described, vacillating between pity, anger, and contempt. Sounds evoke strong corporeal and emotional experiences: it is their whole body that evaluated their neighbors.

THE PARADOX OF SILENT STUDENTS

The fact that students almost unanimously described their neighbors as loud is surprising, since the literature usually portrays the opposite picture, presenting young student renters as a noise nuisance (Hubbard 2008). Mixbury students were no exception: student house parties troubled costudents, local families, and elderly neighbors, whose complaints were mentioned in my data and in media reports. One student explained the dislike of students among locals like her mother (who lived in another campus-adjacent neighborhood): “It’s a nuisance. [The students] don’t care it’s 23:00 o’clock, and it drives [my mother] crazy. . . . Students make noise, me included, and there are complaints. The walls are thin in Mixbury. My mother doesn’t welcome the students” (set E).\(^1\) How can these accounts be reconciled with the students’ common construction of their neighbors as far noisier than themselves?

One possible explanation, borrowed from the social psychology literature, is *biased judgment*. People tend to judge those they consider similar to themselves more leniently than those from whom they want to dissoci-
ate (e.g., Clark 1997, p. 205). In the United States, whites are less likely to perceive neighbors as noisy in all-white neighborhoods, while perceiving minority neighbors as noisier regardless of their particular ethnicity (Guest, Kubrin, and Cover 2008). Furthermore, social psychologists have repeatedly shown that people rely on stereotypes while interpreting and judging the conduct of others, attending to stereotype-confirming information while neglecting stereotype-disconfirming information (Hamilton and Sherman 1994). Mixbury students may simply rely on the common stereotype of poor Mizrahim as noisy, not letting their own loudness influence their imagined representation of reality.

While this may be true, I wish to offer a different, complementary explanation based on the fact that although both students and locals produced loud sounds, these sounds carried different social meanings. The biased judgment explanation assumes that all loud sounds are comparable (hence, students may “actually” be just as noisy as locals). I suggest sounds cannot be compared quantitatively, since some noises reflect on the identity of their perpetrators more than others. A cultural sociology perspective attentive to meaning may thus solve the paradox: whereas loud party music played by students is considered a merely age-related expression of student lifestyle, the class-specific, stigmatized shchuna sounds of locals (such as rows and shouting from windows) are interpreted as representing cultural and moral deficiencies. The former indicate merely inconsiderateness; the latter, also tastelessness and incivility. While some students criticized inconsiderate partygoers, usually party noise does not morally define its perpetrators beyond the immediate context in the same way that shouting from the window does, according to my data. Loudness is thus a matter of cultural meanings, not simply of decibels.

Habituation to sounds may also be shaped by cultural meanings. Simmel (1997, pp. 174–86) famously argued that the city desensitizes its dwellers by exposing them to ever-changing intensive stimuli. Sensory habituation processes are quite familiar to cognitive psychologists: people may simply fail to notice the “normal” sounds of their home environment. Members of different groups (such as student renters and local Mixburians) may thus consider each other loud simply because each group has been habituated to a different sonic environment. However, while some students described their first encounter with shchuna sounds and behaviors as more shocking than later experiences (thus implying habituation), they kept experiencing Mixbury as loud even in their second and third years in the neighborhood. The experience of sound cannot be reduced to the mechanistic effect of exposure and habituation; it is shaped by boundary work, notions of personal and collective identity, and cultural worlds of meaning (such as the notion of shchuna). Those engaging in boundary work have good reasons to refuse to have their ears desensitized and to let the exotic turned into banal “white noise.”
THE SONIC AND THE SOCIAL: MIXBURY AND BEYOND

We have seen above how sonic differences (especially breaches of middle-class sonic norms) are used to characterize people and places, laden with social and moral meanings, and employed as resources in boundary work. It is less clear, however, to what a degree these differences are anchored in the body and reflect intergroup embodied differences. Obviously, the body mediates the sensuous perception of sounds and their production, but to what a degree are bodily habits and sensibilities subject to reflexivity and conscious choice, and how are they related to objective social structures? These questions are at the center of a lively theoretical debate (for a review, see Shilling 2003).

From a Bourdieusian perspective, differences between sonic habits and sensibilities may be interpreted as reflecting deep differences between bodies that underwent different socialization paths and carry a different sonic habitus. For Bourdieu the body is a medium of the social: it carries dispositions, habits, and techniques of the body that are both shaped by one’s position in social space and contributing to the reproduction of this space of class distinction (see also Shilling 2003). The body carries a habitus, defined as a relatively stable and coherent system of durable and transposable dispositions that generate practice while creatively reacting to the field, yet mostly without the mediation of reflexivity (Bourdieu 1977, 1990). The habitus consists of both hexas (its most corporeal components, the motor schemes of body language, posture, and accent) and more abstract schemes of perception, classification, appreciation, feeling, and action, through which even improvised reactions to new situations are guided by the agent’s history, that is, by the social structure inscribed in the body. The strategies that agents devise are informed by these stable dispositions carried in their bodies across contexts. A habitus is shared by a group (typically a social class) and is the somatization of its social position and life conditions. Bourdieu insisted that the multiple dispositions of a habitus usually join into a coherent whole, as the “logic of scheme transfer” makes “each technique of the body a kind of pars totalis” (1977, p. 94). He also insisted that the habitus is relatively fixed: dispositions acquired in early life are stabilized, and although subject to minor modifications by new experiences, these revisions are “never radical” (Bourdieu 1977, 2000). When circumstances change, the inertia of the habitus (hysteresis) often causes actors to act against their

15 While the Bourdieusian body carries habits and skills, it should not be confused with the body in pragmatism. Pragmatists stress the capacity of actors to actively switch codes and styles and choose between multiple “skills” and “capacities” mastered by their bodies, just as they may choose between multiple cultural frameworks they master to evaluate and give meaning to the actions (and sounds) of others. Bourdieu’s actor is its body, which carries a single stable set of dispositions to be activated un reflexively (as “choices imply no acts of choosing”; Bourdieu 1984, p. 474).
own interests. Furthermore, in Bourdieu’s account the habitus is predominantly acquired through unconscious mimesis, remains unconscious, and “cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation” (1977, p. 94), conscious learning, reflexivity, or pedagogy (cf. Mahmood 2005). Sonic differences may well reflect embodied cultural differences, group-specific “sonic habitus” (as members of different groups may acquire in socialization different bodily hexis that shapes their production of sound), and different schemes of perception, classification, and evaluation that inform actors’ interpretation of and reaction to sounds made by others, their sonic preferences, and sensibilities.

Another perspective, diametrically opposed to Bourdieu’s, is the voluntaristic model of postmodernists and second-modernization theorists. These theorists stress the self-transformative capacity of late modern actors, who treat their body as a site of reflexive self-transformation. Scholars such as Anthony Giddens conceptualize the high-modern body as a project. Bodies are not shaped by class position but by their individual owners, who reflexively construct their sense of self-identity by managing their “reflexively mobilized” bodies and their appearance. High-modern individuals can and must choose whom to become; thus, the body becomes a material to be reworked while writing their “DIY biographies.” Rather than an obdurate medium of social structure as in Bourdieu’s model, the body is viewed as a flexible site of agency (Giddens 1991; Shilling 2003, pp. 2–7, 174–76).

Neither of these theoretical frameworks is sufficient to explain the data from Mixbury independently: as demonstrated below, I found some evidence for the existence of obdurate dispositions but also for the engagement of subjects in projects directed at their transformation. Furthermore, embodied social structure (habitus) was not the only social structure that informed social action: in order to make sense of the data, I had to also pay attention to the power of discursive structures. Interviewees within and outside Mixbury referred to a shared set of collective representations, a stable discursive structure that equated quiet with Europe, high culture and education, middle-class status, and self-control and loudness with Arabs and Mizrahim, poverty, vulgarity, and the less educated. All interviewees demonstrated familiarity with this discourse that since the 19th century has used sonic restraint as an index of worthiness and justification for domination (Elias 2000; Bijsterveld 2001; Vaillant 2003). This discursive structure may inform evaluation and behavior independently of any actual difference in habits and sensibilities.

Thus, inspired by Kane (1991) and Hays (1994), I suggest that we should distinguish between two structures that shape sonic conduct and evaluation, one anchored in the body and the other in discourse. While the structured distribution of embodied habits and the structure of binary codes surely
do influence each other, they are made of different materials and follow different logic. Hence, their analytical autonomy must be acknowledged; that is, following Hays and Kane, they should be analytically isolated before exploring their interrelations.

Empirically I found (as detailed below) that the bodies of some students were socialized to physically react to *shchuna* sounds, yet others who lacked these middle-class dispositions still participated in boundary work by using common discourses and adhering to the student group style (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). Furthermore, some students tried to transform their own habits and dispositions within projects of identification and social mobility. Hence, I offer a triangular model in which actors actively engage in self-identification and boundary delineation projects that are always shaped by and against two deep structures, embodied and discursive.

Sonic Styles, Sonic Habitus

The Mixbury case supplies strong evidence for the existence of distinct sonic styles (consisting of speech volume, music preferences, sonic sensibilities, and attitudes toward public space and its sonic regulation). Interviewees strongly associated sonic styles with social groups in terms of class, ethnicity, and education and read them as indexes of moral and social worth, as in the case of the *shchuna* sonic style.

Talking about styles in the pragmatist tradition usually implies that subjects can switch styles depending on context.\(^{16}\) However, interviewees usually assumed strong correlations between fixed social identities and sonic practices. This might be a mere discursive construct unrelated to reality—a purely imaginary difference used in boundary work, the product of biased, *ethnicized cognition* (Schwarz, 2014) that underplays intragroup variance, overestimates intergroup differences, and ascribes perceived differences to group membership. However, there is evidence that stubborn group-related dispositions inform sonic styles and sonic evaluation, as suggested by the notion of sonic habitus.

The notion of the habitus, a system of durable and transposable dispositions that generate practices, is generally used to understand intergroup differences and intragroup similarities (even in reaction to new situations) and individual consistencies across contexts. We may thus specify sonic habitus as the sonic dimension of habitus—embodied collective habits and schemes that shape the production, perception, experience, and evalua-

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\(^{16}\) See, e.g., Carter (2003) and Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003); however, actors often develop long-term preferences and avoid applying different styles simultaneously (Mallard, Lamont, and Guetzkow 2009).
tion of sounds. Sonic habitus may include dispositions to speak loudly or to monitor one’s own speech volume, emotional reactions to sounds, disposition to express emotions sonically (the sonic dimension of display rules; Hochschild 1983), corporeal sensibilities (what is experienced as noise or a jarring disturbance), and social classificatory schemes (the reading of some sounds and sonic practices as indicating identities and social worth).

Interviewees often believed that sonic differences were anchored in bodily skills rather than reflecting strategic choices. They repeatedly claimed that Mixburians “are simply unable” to talk quietly. Similarly, some middle-class interviewees (sets A and D) claimed that they were not capable of properly shouting: even while trying, they could not bring themselves to yell with full throat as shehina people would—neither in conflicts nor to grab attention from a distance. Just as middle-class girls “throw like a girl” (Young 1980), they could only shout like middle-class wusses. Thus, one student felt his rare attempts to shout were unconvincing, comparing himself to a sitcom protagonist who is “being laughed at for not being able to express his anger, because his voice rises to such a comic tone. I really feel like that.” Another student said that despite his disrespect for Mixbury, shouting from the window is “just not something I can bring myself to do” (using the Hebrew corporeal metaphor lehotzi me’azmi, “extracting it from myself”). Adapting local sonic norms would not only threaten students’ sense of dignity but also pose a corporeal challenge.

Another piece of evidence for sonic habitus is the intense emotional reactions sounds evoked. Intuitive moral and emotional gut reactions are increasingly understood as shaped by the habitus (Sayer 2005; Ignatow 2009; Vaisey 2009). My data show that emotional/moral aversion to class others, which is a key component of middle-class subjectivity (the “disgusted class”; Lawler 2005), has a strong sonic component: even describing the sonic practices of Mixbury embarrassed interviewees, angered them, or made them burst into laughter (laughter occurred dozens of times, e.g., when referring to the refusal of neighbors to turn the music down or to a woman who called her son to come home from the window for 10 minutes or in focus groups where stories often evoked general laughter), whereas being asked whether they partake in these practices offended them (“Like, is that what you’re asking? N-o!”). These immediate, intense corporeal/emotional reactions are typically attributed to the moral habitus (Ignatow 2009; Vaisey 2009). Adhering to a certain sonic style and evaluating those of others does not seem to reflect stylistic choices but rather deep moral embodied sensibilities.

Finally, the data contain evidence of intergenerational reproduction of sonic sensibilities and judgments. Thus, a middle-class student mentioned that his abhorrence of store announcers and of playing recorded music in nature reserves are the same as his parents’, while another student abhorred
shouting from the window, as her parents associated it with “uncivilized” Mizrahim and banned her from doing it as a child.

If sonic behaviors and experiences were determined solely by the interaction between stable habitus and changing habitats, we would consider students’ reactions to Mixbury’s sounds almost inevitable: middle-class students acquire corporeal aversion to shchuna sonic practices at a young age, making the distinct habituses of the two groups simply incompatible. Such an interpretation would bear a disturbing message regarding multiculturalism and heterogeneity. However, this interpretation must be declined for historical, empirical, and theoretical reasons. Historically, Israel is an immigrant society, where most families experienced (positive or negative) social mobility within the last century, while many of its current markers of class difference (including sonic norms; see n. 7) have only developed over the last few decades. This relative instability of both social positions and semiotic markers speaks against emphasizing intergenerational reproduction too strongly. This deterministic account also has theoretical flaws, as it fails to acknowledge agency and social dynamics. Theorists convincingly claim that objective cultural differences, significant as they might be, can never prescribe symbolic boundaries regardless of boundary work (Barth 1969; Tilly 2004; Jenkins 2008). Most important, my empirical data (presented below) show that students engage in boundary work even without sharing middle-class sonic habitus and that some students actively invest in transforming their sonic habitus.

Sonic Learning

Curiously enough, some Mizrahi students participated in the stigmatization of Mixburians, while describing their own families as noisy or their own home neighborhoods as shchuna. One student described how her father embarrassed her during a visit, by answering his cellphone with a thundering voice inside the university’s library. Raised in a middle-class mostly Ashkenazi town as a daughter of a working-class Mizrahi family who was much too loud for its neighbors, she describes how it took her a long time to find the right balance, not being too loud and yet being heard. Another (middle-class Mizrahi) student described a neighbor in her original neighborhood who “wouldn’t be ashamed to shout at her daughter from the eighth floor ‘come up immediately!’” These students used existing boundaries and categorizations strategically: their status aspirations meant learning shame and abhorrence of shchuna practices. Unable to ignore prevalent discourses, they could still appropriate them.

Another student told me how she has changed her disputing style: she no longer raises her voice as she used to and finds it “stupid.” She explained how this self-change started in the army, where she served in a special pro-
gram and trained soldiers coming from extremely low socioeconomic backgrounds, “girls, who fulfill every stereotype [like satiric TV characters]. As the time passed by, while training them, I understood that loud disputes are typical of people in hardship.” Her obvious desire to dissociate herself from them encouraged reflexive self-transformation of her sonic style. Joining the university made her commitment to this change even stronger. This is the kind of conscious somatic learning and self-transformation that Bourdieus’s model (which underestimates reflexivity) is often criticized for lacking (Rancière 2004; Mahmood 2005; Adams 2006). Sonic sensibilities and moral and emotional schemes are embodied and stubborn, yet people may understand their semiotics and reflexively hone them. This is particularly true for class transfuges, who according to Lahire have a plural habitus, contradictory schemes of evaluation and action that might be activated in different contexts, as they still carry dispositions they learned to see through the eyes of the hegemonic (middle-class) group (Lahire 2011, pp. 36–41, 56).17

Among the students themselves there is much intragroup variance in sonic behaviors and sensibilities, hidden behind the “mask of similarity” (Jenkins 2008, p. 134), that is, their discursive engagement in boundary work. Some students reported being indifferent to noise in other contexts while still participating in the social game of finding Mixburians unbearably loud and exoticizing their noise, a performance of Mixburian studentship central to their group style (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003) and collective identity. Sonic styles thus do not always rely on dispositional depth, that is, sonic habitus. Actors may learn to demonstrate sensory squeamishness, which (just like the cultural squeamishness studied by Bourdieu [1984]) is an asset, the demonstration of which classifies the classifiers.

Triangular Interplay

The story is thus much less deterministic and more complicated: whereas habits, dispositions, and sensibilities inscribed in bodies may be durable and stubborn, some people consciously invest in acquiring a new habitus that would better suit their identificatory aspirations (e.g., integration in the middle class). The body and its socialized senses are stabilizing forces but not sites of endless nonreflexive reproduction, and the boundary work strategies actors choose matter much. A major source of complexity is the fact

17 This revision of the Bourdieusian model relies on the assumption that habitus is rarely monolithic and keeps being acquired throughout the life course. I depart from Lahire by refusing to understand this plurality in deterministic terms and by insisting on the agentic dimension of action.
that our perception of people (and places) is always mediated by both language and the senses. These two are interrelated: sensory experience is informed by prior discursive knowledge and assumptions (Bloom 2010) and by verbal formulations of cultural codes (like those discussed by Swidler [2003]), just as these sensory experiences later inform and transform discursive accounts.

Discourses on social difference cannot persist unless translated into routine ways of talking, acting, and sensing, thus allowing sense experiences to “facilitate and (re)produce the imaginative geography of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Haldrup, Koefoed, and Simonsen 2006, p. 181). The boundary work of Mixbury students may be viewed as a case of such “practical Orientalism” (and practical classism), without which isolated noise events or loud neighbors would remain individual cases rather than be framed as instances of a wider phenomenon. Their experience and evaluation of sounds is shaped by the interplay of three factors:

1. **Discourses** that endow sounds with symbolic meanings, for example, as markers of civility, class, or ethnicity;

2. Subjective embodied **experiences of sensory encounters** (in our case, encounters with the actual sounds of Mixbury and its inhabitants), which are mediated by acquired somatic sensibilities (perceptive schemes that are part of the sonic habitus); and the

3. **Strategic identification choices** of students that are always made in relation to one’s body and to the discursive construction of social identities and stereotypes.

This may serve as a departure point for the development of a general model for the sociology of the senses. Sonic experiences, categorizations, and evaluations are inherently social and produced by the complex interplay of cultural structure anchored in discourse, social structure anchored in the body, and identification strategies of actors. The same triangle may also sociologically explain sound production, that is, the sonic styles of different actors: as the cases discussed above demonstrate, students may support their identification projects by engaging in boundary work on the discursive level (even without sharing corporeal sensibility to shchuna sounds) or by investing in acquiring new sonic dispositions.

Whereas sonic habits and sensibilities may be somatized at a young age and pose resistance to self-change, habitus does not translate automatically into a structure of symbolic boundaries. Sonic boundaries cannot be reduced to either embodied experience (the somatization of social structure) or prevalent discursive structures: instead, they are produced by the interaction of both structures with strategic identification choices of individuals.
CONCLUSION

Through a case study of a socially heterogeneous neighborhood, I demonstrated that sounds inform typification, social classification, evaluation, and stigmatization of both people and places and are mobilized in boundary work. Sounds can play these significant social roles because, as Simmel suggested, they mediate our knowledge and experience of others. The contribution of the sonic to the delineation of symbolic boundaries relies on two kinds of sociocultural structures: the sonic habitus, that is, group-specific sonic habits, preferences, and sensibilities anchored in the body (although susceptible to self-transformation), and prevalent discourses on the meanings of sounds as markers of social identity.

In Mixbury, students who were concerned about not “mixing” with their low-status neighbors drew symbolic boundaries around an established set of stigmatized sounds and sonic practices commonly identified with being ghetto (shchuna). Exoticizing these sonic practices is a significant component of doing middle-classness in Mixbury and beyond it. Simmel was thus right in suggesting that sociologists should attend to senses other than vision, for their role in social evaluation of others and for the impressions and emotions they evoke.

Differences in sonic styles represent different attitudes toward space and its desired levels of regulation, classification, and privatization. Even if interclass differences in conduct have generally decreased (Wouters 2007), sonic differences still exist and are perceived and interpreted as significant. The fact that interviewees of a humble background engaged in sonic self-transformation as part of their projects of social mobility and identification demonstrates how central sonic styles are for doing class and race. As open racism and classism lose legitimacy (Taguieff 2001), these cultural differences may play ever greater importance in boundary work, allowing privileged groups to deem others unworthy not for their ascriptive identities but rather for embodying shchuna culture by shouting from windows or blasting music while driving. Sonic experiences not only legitimize social hierarchies but also load them with affect. Stigmatized sounds evoke instinctive moral-cum-emotional reactions and are hence central to “embodied taxonomies” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 475). Sonic conduct, sensibilities, and reactions are often shaped by nonreflexive habits of the socialized body (sonic habitus) but are not determined by sonic habitus alone: some interviewees engaged in boundary work strategically regardless of their embodied sensibilities, while others endeavored to transform their sonic habitus. Thus, embodied structures (sonic habitus) and meaning structures (discourses on loudness) set the stage for the demonstration of reflexive agency through identification projects. Sociology of the senses in Simmel’s sense is interested in the interface of bodies and
meanings in interaction; hence, it can make a significant contribution in theo-

rizing the plurality of social structures.

Future Implications

One important issue that remains for future research is the globalization of sonic class norms. Meanings of sounds in Mixbury were shaped by both the peculiarities of ethnoclass stratification in Israel and global features of middle-classness (privacy, spatial specialization, emotional expression norms, and respectability). However, some similarities between Mixbury and anecdotal data from the American gentrification literature are striking. These similarities, alongside evidence that some sonic practices were stigmatized in Israel only recently, may indicate globalization processes of the middle-class sensorium. As demonstrated above, middle-class distaste for “loudness” should not be taken literally in terms of decibels, yet it is possible that middle-class constructions of loudness (sets of stigmatized sounds and the meanings associated with them) are partly converging worldwide to produce isomorphic class sonic boundaries across national contexts.\textsuperscript{18} However, as my current study focuses on a single site in a single era, this hypothesis remains open for future comparative historical-sociological research.

The evidence presented above for the role of marked sonic practices in neighborhood classification and stigmatization may also inform future research in urban sociology: it is important to gather data on sounds both in ethnographic neighborhood research (exploring local meanings of sounds and sound conflicts) and in revising quantitative research methods like systematic social observation (recording and analyzing auditory data alongside video data). Models predicting perceived neighborhood disorder and neighborhood deterioration may be improved by incorporating sonic low-status cues such as music from parked cars and shouts from windows.

Finally, the role of the sonic in spatial exclusion emerges as a key question. My data indicate that stigmatized sonic practices make certain people want to avoid living in certain neighborhoods (because of both the unpleasant experience of “noise” and the class/ethnic symbolic coloring of space) or fear their inhabitants (as their sonic style presumably indicates violence). Interviewees also mentioned avoiding various public spaces because of their sounds. It remains open to study, therefore, when sounds not only mark the identity of spaces but actually exclude those not belonging.

Instead of \textit{the} somatic order and sonic norms of \textit{the} modern subjectivity (Sennett 1977; Vannini et al. 2010), we must acknowledge the existence of

\textsuperscript{18}This assimilation of class boundaries may take place independently of national sonic boundary work, e.g., the construction of Americans as loud by Europeans.
multiple sensory experiences and sensibilities, multiple moral stances regarding the legitimacy of sounds, and different sonic styles—which play a role in group identification and in the social dynamics of boundary work. Mixbury demonstrates that sonic differences may matter much, that sensory sensibilities and experiences are social, and that sonic experiences—like all various kinds of sensory experiences—should be better integrated into our sociological accounts and theorizations.

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