

# GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE IN SOCIOLOGY

1<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting  
September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003  
Amargosa Room, Lied Library  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

# FIRST ANNUAL GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE IN SOCIOLOGY

## **1) Conflict, Politics, and Women Issues**

**9:00 – 10:25 am**

Violence Before Capitalism  
Roger Roots

Guerrilla Warfare in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Fight is on, When is the End?  
Deo Mshigeni

Sex Worker, Sex Object: The Effect of Globalization on Prostitution  
Megan Wilson

Perfect Bodies, Perfect Selves: Defining a Positive Body Image  
Amy Bobo

Discussant: Dr. Jennifer Keene  
Presider: Tina Wininger

Break

## **2) Issues in Pedagogy and Epistemology**

**10:30 - 12:00 pm**

The Cold Classroom: Gender Issues in Math and Science Education  
Amanda Dean

Sociological Knowledge: A Social Network Analysis of Journal Citations  
Michael Restivo

Shaped Goals: Teaching Undergraduates the Effects of Social Stratification on the Formulation of Goals  
Giselle Touzard

A Social Psychological Look at After School Tutoring  
Paula Walsh

Discussant: Dr. Anastasia Prokos  
Presider: Megan Wilson

Lunch Break

**12:00 - 1:00 pm**

### **3) Deconstructing Cultural Texts**

**1:00 - 2:25 pm**

A Marxist Approach to “White Trash” in Flannery O’Connor’s Novels  
Michelle Gladman

A Poststructural View of How to Know God  
Megan Hartzell

A Case of the White Knight Rescuing the "Other" in Distress: Race, Class, and Gender in the film *Monster's Ball*  
Teri Pfeifer

The Sacramento Poetry Scene: A Study Of Community Poetry and Politics  
Dana Maher

Discussant: Dr. Simon Gottschalk  
Presider: Tina Wininger

Break

### **4) Individuals, Families, and Social Organizations**

**2:30 - 4:00 pm**

Sibling Relationships in Changing American Families  
Monique Diderich Balsam

Goffman, Pets, and People: An Analysis of Humans and Their Companion Animals  
Lisa Sarmicanic

A Study of Communitarianism in a Human Service Organization: A Study of the Peace Corps  
Tracy Starman

Women Recovering in Alcoholics Anonymous: The Impact of Social Bonding  
Tina Marie Wininger

Discussant: Dr. Andrea Fontana  
Presider: Megan Wilson

## Conflict, Politics, and Women Issues

### **Violence Before Capitalism Roger Roots**

Paramount among the propositions that are universally held among sociologists is the idea that capitalism promotes social conflict, competition and violence. This idea is so burrowed into the bedrock of contemporary social theory that it can be counted among mainstream sociology's "laws." Yet the relationship between violence and capitalism has never been accurately demonstrated empirically. In this paper, I conduct a cross-national and historical analysis of homicide rates and compare them with indexes of capitalistic economies. I conclude that if capitalism and violence are related at all, the relationship is inverse; the more capitalistic a society is, the safer it generally is. These findings suggest that mainstream sociology should reconsider its positions with regard to free market economics.

### **Guerrilla Warfare in Sub-Saharan Africa: The fight is on, when is the End? Deo Mshigeni**

Guerrilla or irregular warfare seems to be pretty well as old as recorded history, but its place is evidently larger than it used to be. This paper shows that this kind of warfare has been above all a political and social enterprise with specific characteristics. The paper is about guerrilla warfare in Sub-Saharan Africa, but the Sub-Saharan Africa and is reliable guide to a wider picture of such movements and warfare elsewhere in the world. For the first time since 1989, Africa has more armed conflicts than any other continent (Joseph: 1999; 299). By the late 1990's, wars in Africa increasingly had taken on regional character, especially in the Greater horn, the Great lakes region and Southern Africa. As of mid 1999, wars were ongoing in Angola, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan and Liberia. Sub-Saharan Africa is the area most affected by wars in Africa, hence, the paper focuses on issues affecting this particular region. The most important characteristic of guerrilla movements in Sub-Saharan Africa is that the wars start as a small conflicts or internal strife. Yet, the internally based insurgencies frequently build ties with neighboring states to gain access to safe havens and military resources, thereby adding an interstate dimension to a conflict that originated in local grievance. Many times the conflicts are caused by poverty, competition for meager resources and general ignorance about the broader challenges of nation building, such as the need to overcome racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious chauvinism and parochialism. Moreover, conflict in turn compels nations to invest heavily in weaponry and military establishment, thereby aggravating the economic and political life hardships that are created by conflicts. This short paper discusses the impact of guerrilla warfare on the development of political system in Sub-Saharan Africa and shows the intensity of these conflicts and their genocidal dimensions.

## **Sex Worker, Sex Object: The Effect of Globalization on Prostitution**

### **Megan Wilson**

Feminism has a variety of responses to prostitution considering it to be everything from society's most explicit exploiter of women to an opportunity for women to empower their sexuality. This paper explores the argument that class bias in combination with racial and gender labeling influence the status and treatment of prostitutes. Following this theoretical perspective, as the effects of globalization increase the economic and social circumstances of prostitutes reflect the class inequalities found in the larger global economy to a greater degree. Creating a feedback loop in which, the race, class, gender, and geographic location of a prostitute effects his/her living conditions and social status, similar to how the race, class, gender, and geographic location of workers effect their living conditions and social status.

## **Perfect Bodies, Perfect Selves: Defining a Positive Body Image**

### **Amy Bobo**

In American culture it simply is not socially acceptable for women to talk positively about their bodies. So, how do you go about creating a positive body image if you are not allowed to verbally profess it? What other factors are involved? In what other ways can one develop and maintain a positive body image? These are the questions that inspired my research. I employ a sample of adolescent women cheerleaders and dancers. I purposefully chose this group because it consists of girls whose goal is embedded in their sport or art which requires an intense and sustained investment of effort, thought, and energy towards the body. My research questions are the following: 1) How do these girls define a positive body image? 2) What factors contribute to adolescent girls having positive body images? 3) How do they express a positive body image, 4) Are there any social/cultural limitations on who is allowed to express a positive body image? I use observations, individual interviews, and group interviews to answer my research questions. Utilization of multiple methods provided me with a flexible approach that both allowed me to integrate individual and social explanations of body image, and enabled me to triangulate my data when developing categories during the analytical stage, thereby increasing validity but detecting contradictions. These themes of contradiction and dualism were apparent in my informants' definitions of the body image. Many indicated this separation when talking about perfection, control, regulation, and display of their bodies. For my informants, feeling positive about their bodies is a conditional feeling based on effort invested in the body that is regulated by attitudes about health, perfection, and self-worth. On the other hand, however, they find it unacceptable to be such a perfectionist towards your body that you transgress these standards and lose too much weight (and some of your mind).

## Issues in Pedagogy and Epistemology

### **The Cold Classroom: Gender issues in Math and Science Education.** **Amanda Dean**

This paper examines the challenges of female students in traditionally masculine academic subject areas. It will begin with a brief discussion of general classroom inequities between boys and girls in primary education. The major discussion will focus on disparities in academic achievement in Math and Science courses, and the epidemic of math anxiety among female students of all ages. This will lead to a short discussion of the implications of these differences in higher education and the limitation of choice of college majors. The final portion of this paper is a discussion of the sociological ramifications for these educational disparities as well ideas for future research into this subject.

### **Sociological Knowledge: A Social Network Analysis of Journal Citations** **Michael Restivo**

This research seeks to uncover the complex interrelationships among subfields of specialization within the discipline of sociology by analyzing the exchange of knowledge across sociology journals. By employing a novel network-type analysis of journal citations, I have created a model for the dynamic structure of paths of influence from one journal to another and one subfield to another. Although this research is still in the preliminary or discovery phase, I have made one initial finding that warrants further inquiry: the exchange of knowledge is not reciprocal and displays an imbalance between key producers and consumers of knowledge. Avenues for additional research are considered.

### **Shaped Goals: Teaching Undergraduates the Effects of Social Stratification on the Formulation of Goals** **Giselle Touzard**

This article describes an in-class activity that helps undergraduate students to understand the effects of their socio-economic position on the pursuit, formulation, and achievement of goals. In this activity, students are stratified into three different economic classes and are asked to talk about their goals. Social stratification and inequality have an initial impact on the formulation of goals. Through this activity students perceive the effects of having a restraint in the pursuit of their goals and understand the impact of their socio-economic position in society. Students learn that social stratification and inequality are not alienated from life experience in this activity, and students have a chance to experience the effects of these concepts that become more than conceptual terminology explained in a textbook. Participating in and observing the activity provide students with the experience needed to evaluate their own personal situation.

## **A Social Psychological Look at After School Tutoring**

**Paula Walsh**

In this study, tutoring effectiveness at an after school program is analyzed from three differing viewpoints through the lens of social psychology. The focus centers on how tutor behavior, resulting from tutors' motivation, definition of the meaning of the situation, or use of learning or role theory, affects student behavior. In turn, parents' perceptions of the children's behavior are looked at with the goal of determining what parents perceive to be effective tutoring strategies. The researcher uses methods such as conducting informal interviews with the staff and collecting extensive field notes during site visits to the program. In addition to this, formal interviews are conducted with the tutors in order to obtain their views of the process. Finally, parent surveys are given to receive input on the children's behavior and the perceived effectiveness of the tutoring program. It appears that how tutors define the tutoring situation and the meaning they attribute to tutoring affects the role they play and the role their students take during tutoring. Along with this symbolic interactionist definition of the meaning of the situation and use of role theory, tutors and students were also observed utilizing learning theory and dramaturgy during tutoring. Dramaturgy, in the form of impression management and role distance, also appeared during the tutor interviews. Parental perceptions of the program are overwhelmingly favorable, with no apparent relation to tutor and child behavior. It is possible that due to the timing of the study and extreme social concerns, any program that keeps students in a safe, supervised area after school is viewed as positive.

## Deconstructing Cultural Texts

### **A Marxist Approach to “White Trash” in Flannery O’Connor’s Novels Michelle Gladman**

This honors thesis will address the relationship between fictional characters in Southern Literature and Marxist theory in order to explore why and how certain stereotypes are created and perpetuated. I examine the relationship between Marxist concepts and characters within Flannery O'Connor's novels by revealing the parallels between social class and religious identity. More specifically, I apply Marxist concepts of class, false consciousness, religion, and alienation to specific characters within O'Connor's two novels, *Wiseblood* and *The Violent Bear it Away*. I argue that these are valuable novels to explore because both are demonstrative of "white trash" culture, and provide insight into how religion can result in false consciousness and alienation.

### **A Poststructural View of How to Know God Megan Hartzell**

Drawing from Foucault’s notions of authorities of delimitation (who have the power to speak), and Lacan’s theory of the alienated ego in search of a feeling of unity, I perform a discourse analysis of Deepak Chopra’s How To Know God. Specifically, I look at how this top-selling book commandeers the tenets of Zen Buddhism and Taoism (which emphasize unity with the universe) and hegemonically transform these notions in a way which separates the constructed reader from obtaining the objet petit a (in Lacainian terms) of Enlightenment, or fully knowing God. I focus on the construction of: 1) the reader, 2) the knower (with the authority to speak), and 3) God, and the hierarchies emerging from Chopra’s narrative. Each statement he deploys about some essential path toward Enlightenment is based on the assumption that the current space the reader occupies is somehow not where the reader should be, and that in order to achieve Enlightenment one must follow specified steps (such as the hegemonic pull to purchase specific books on “how to” get there). Focusing on the discursive split between the subjugated reader and the glorified God, I analyze the ways in which Chopra constructs specified subject positions for readers to enter which further the sacred/secular split and promote the very alienation he purports to be dismantling.

**A Case of the White Knight Rescuing the "Other" in Distress: Race, Class, and Gender in the film *Monster's Ball***  
**Teri Pfeifer**

Utilizing a synthesis of the categories of class, gender, and race, my project is to show how the film *Monster's Ball* contains an important subtext that reinforces dominant patriarchal capitalism. This subtext is a device for the reproduction of cultural stereotypes of women living within patriarchy, more specifically, black women. The film offers itself as a romantic narrative of transformation with the two central characters, one white, middle-class, and male; the "other" black, lower-class and female, acting upon each other. The male lead is literally transformed by his black female lover's body; interestingly enough, a body that this time is valued for its difference. In turn, she achieves cross-class movement via heterosexuality. I shall draw on neo-Marxism, Gramscian Marxism with its concept of hegemony, critical race theory, and Lacanian feminism to provide a systematic deconstruction of the film *Monster's Ball* by demonstrating how the media's stereotyped images and oppressiveness toward women reinforces and reproduces institutional patriarchy.

**The Sacramento Poetry Scene: A Study Of Community Poetry And Politics**  
**Dana Maher**

What does poetry have to offer to sociology? Sociology of art rarely recognizes poetry as a viable art form for social study, nor does it include the emotional aspects of art in analysis. This comparative study observed the Sacramento Poetry Scene in order to illustrate the connections between community poetry and politics using grounded theory. Two primary sites were used for data collection: Luna's Café's Thursday Nights Poetry Unplugged and the Sacramento Poetry Center's Monday Night Open Mic Series. Data sources included field notes from the venues and from other community poetry events, conversations, fliers, poems, and the built environments utilized by the venues. Analysis was conducted in the following areas: spatial composition, organizational structure, social composition, aesthetics, and politics. It was shown that community art spaces are places where political dialogue occurs. This dialogue is unique because it does not ignore the prominence of emotion. Furthermore, the inter-group politics between the two community arts groups studied here reflect the dynamics of inequality that are prevalent in society. A sub-group of crossover poets were identified for future study, as they are a unique group of persons able to cross group boundaries, receiving recognition and maintaining respect throughout the scene.

## **Individuals, Families, and Social Organizations**

### **Sibling Relationships in Changing American Families Monique Diderich Balsam**

The decline of the traditional nuclear family in the United States has led to a growing number of children not being raised in a family constellation where both biological parents and full siblings are present. Currently, only 33 million (or approximately 50%) of school age children reside in such a family setting. The United States still ranks as the nation with the highest divorce rate in the world and this trend does not seem to decline substantially in the near future. Parental divorce changes the family structure, effects children both financially and emotionally and has an impact on sibling relationships. Although research indicates that the negative effects of divorce “wear off” over time, the majority of divorced parents remarry, and as a result their offspring has to adjust to the changes in family dynamics in their now blended family that may contain a stepparent, stepsiblings and potentially half siblings. Ideally, the blended family provides an extension of children’s kinship support system (maternal kin, paternal kin and stepkin). In reality, this is not the case. Bonds between children and their non-residential biological parent – usually the father- tend to become weaker as well as children’s bonds with the relatives of their non-residential parent (e.g., paternal grandparents, paternal aunts, uncles and paternal cousins). Further, research indicates that family bonds in blended families are less strong compared to family bonds in traditional nuclear families. For example, adults who grew up in blended families report feeling closer to their full siblings than to their half siblings or stepsiblings.

### **Goffman, Pets, and People: An Analysis of Humans and Their Companion Animals Lisa Sarmicanic**

In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Erving Goffman takes the familiar sociological concept of ‘role’ to new heights by placing the analysis of human behavior in a theatrical setting. The notion of ‘impression management’ or the ways in which individuals control the impressions of others, is especially important. In order to achieve desired appearances, individuals must be aware of their front stage performances which include items of “‘expressive equipment’ like clothing, facial expressions, and body gestures” (Goffman, 1959:22). By extension, I believe it is possible to argue that one’s pet is part of one’s presentation of self. Using Goffman’s The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life I will analyze the role of animals as living additions to the complex sets required for front stage performances. I will use Goffman’s text to explore the ways in which animals reflect the selves we create as humans. Pets highlight those aspects of our selves which we admire and symbolize those which we find less than exemplary. Companion animals function not only as symbols to the outer world of our preferences, but also reveal aspects of our inner selves which we may rarely acknowledge.

**A Study of Communitarianism in a Human Service Organization: A Study of the Peace Corps**  
**Tracy Starman**

I discuss the methods I will be using for my thesis research in the fall. Though my fieldwork has not yet begun, I outline a brief history of new communitarianism as it is articulated in the work of Selznick, Etzioni, Glendon and others. I survey the history of the Peace Corps, and outline my research design. I am hoping to conduct a focus group in the early fall, as well as a few one-on-one interviews which will inform the construction of a survey instrument that will measure the presence of new communitarian attitudes among leadership in the Peace Corps.

**Women Recovering in Alcoholics Anonymous: The Impact of Social Bonding**  
**Tina Marie Winger**

This study examines the process of same-sex bonding within the Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) women's community. More specifically, this research measures the impact of same-sex bonding on life-satisfaction and length of sobriety for alcoholic women in A.A. Linear regression analyses of survey data from female A.A. members (N=293) indicate (1) a statistically significant relationship between Respondents' same-sex social bonding and life-satisfaction, and (2) that the effect of this social bonding on the number of years respondents have remained sober is mediated by life-satisfaction. Therefore, it is likely that higher female bonding scores among women lead to higher life-satisfaction and, in turn, higher life-satisfaction leads to longer sobriety terms. This model is supported by qualitative data gathered from ten volunteer survey respondents. Informants indicated that their self-transformations resulted in a positive attitude change toward same-sex bonding; in addition, sexual dynamics may play a role in such change. Future research should explore these relationships.

2003 Program Committee

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Mike Restivo, Session Organizer  
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