



Healthy Outlook

Division of Health, Health Policy and Health Services
of the Society for the Study of Social Problems

Spring 2004

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Statement from the Co-Chair

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Greetings to all members of the Health, Health Policy and Health Services Division.

As we look forward to our summer meeting, we consider the theme of the conference, *The Culture of Social Problems: Power, People and History*. Through the lens of health, our forthcoming meeting becomes an opportunity for us to engage critically in our subject area and to look closely at current ideas on “culture”, “social problems” alongside “health”, “health policy” and “health services”. I must admit that for me attendance at SSSP Annual conference is always a highpoint in my academic year. As you know, I live in Britain where the culture of social problems in the area of health is shaped by the fact that the National Health Service has been going through many difficult changes over the past years. While my sociological colleagues in Britain in a number of forums look critically at these and related changes in health care, I find consistently that the opportunity to bring and share my ideas with my SSSP colleagues ‘across the pond’ is very rewarding. I have found that developing an international perspective on health, health policy and health services has been crucial for me in developing a critical sociological perspective – in problematizing my work and giving it a critical edge. I feel privileged in that I am able every summer to reflect in the context of a friendly professional association on issues which I feel passionately about.

This year I know I will enjoy nurturing those cross-cultural links that have developed with my SSSP colleagues over the years. It is my hope that participation in this conference will strengthen *all* of our member’s critical perspective on the culture of health, health policy and health services as well as allow us to look more closely at the politics of health in the 21st Century. Yes, health is very much related to the culture of social problems. This year we need especially to interrogate how power, people and history *vis-a-vis* health problems converge, intersect, and conflict in shaping current understandings of the culture of health.

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Health, Health Policy, & Health Services Division Graduate Student Paper Award

Deadline: June 1, 2004

All graduate students are encouraged to apply for this annual paper award competition. The paper should be related to the broad Division interest, including health and illness, health policy, and health services. The paper submission should not exceed 30 double-spaced pages and should be prepared for anonymous review (with the author specified on a title page but not referred to in other parts of the text). Current graduate students and recent graduates (who received their degrees after January 2003) may submit a paper if it was written while still a student. Papers based on theses or dissertations are acceptable. (Please do not submit the thesis or dissertation itself.) Co-authored papers are acceptable as long as all the listed authors are current graduate students. Double submission to other SSSP award competitions would be disqualified.

The award recipient will be required to present the winning paper at the 2004 SSSP annual meeting in Atlanta. Thus it is strongly recommended that an abstract of the paper be submitted to any Health Division session organizer or the roundtable organizer by the January 31st deadline (or contact the Division Co-chairs for advice after January 2004). The recipient will receive a monetary prize of \$100, student membership to SSSP, SSSP conference registration, and a ticket to the SSSP awards banquet.

Send three copies of the paper and a short letter of submission identifying your graduate program by June 1, 2004 to: SSSP Health, Health Policy, and Health Services Student Paper Competition, Professor Judith N. Lasker, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, 681 Taylor Street, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA 18015.

“What They’re Reading Now”

What are you reading in medical sociology? Please email citations of articles or books to Emily for inclusion in the next Healthy Outlook: kolker@brandeis.edu

From Elizabeth Ettorre, Co-Chair of the Division:

Elson, Jean. 2003. *Am I Still A Woman? Hysterectomy and Gender Identity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

****NOTE**** *Am I Still A Woman* will be featured at the 2004 meetings in a special author meets critics session.

From Peter Conrad, Brandeis University:

Rothman, Sheila M. and David J. Rothman. 2003. *The Pursuit of Perfection: The Promise and Perils of Medical Enhancement*. New York: Pantheon Books.

From Emily Kolker, Division Newsletter Editor:

Elliott, Carl. 2003. *Better than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

~ **SSSP 54th Annual Meeting** ~
August 13 - 15, 2004

**THE CULTURE OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS:
POWER, PEOPLE, & HISTORY**

The study of social problems necessarily implicates sociologists in the weave of power, people, and history that shapes who and what are considered problematic. While members of SSSP have a commitment to using sociological tools to intervene productively in existing problematic relations (e.g., racism, poverty, environmental destruction), at times our work can also be complicit with what Dorothy Smith calls "relations of ruling" and what Foucault names "disciplinary power." That is, in collecting "data" and advocating solutions, we might not only shed new light on troubling aspects of society, but also solidify boundaries, dichotomies, and hierarchies that exalt the historically constituted preferences and privileges of some and exclude and distort those of others. During periods of particularly vicious imperialist violence, such as the one we are currently experiencing, it is tempting to assign ourselves the role of truth giving experts. Submitting to this temptation, for profit or principle, makes it more difficult to question, learn, and know in ways that challenge domination and promote freedom. It is imperative that we act, but also that we examine the political and historical influences of our actions. In referring to the culture of social problems, I am thinking not only of the multiple cultures of troubled social institutions and unjust social practices, but also the culture of social science research, teaching and writing in which we are all participants. Meeting together to focus our thoughts on the culture of social problems gives us an opportunity to engage in creative criticism that can move beyond conventional

expertise to new ways of thinking and understanding. Foucault described this kind of criticism as one that would "light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply not judgments but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep...It would not be sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightning of possible storms." (from *The Masked Philosopher* interview, 1980). Our members bring a rich array of resources to engage in creative criticism, from poetry to performance, historical analysis to ethnography. I invite you to participate in these meetings in whatever way "multiplies signs of existence" as a way of stimulating the storms that can make sociology a creative, ethical endeavor. By invoking "culture" as a socially produced and situated frame, I hope people will be encouraged to think broadly about how our work is shaped by the cultures in which we travel, as well as how cultural interventions can be useful and pleasurable sociological projects. As the ASA focuses on "public sociologies," our meetings can offer space to contemplate how to go public without going corporate, elitist, arrogant, or boring. Power, people, and history are all categories that seem to me essential for a creative criticism that does not succumb to the multiplication of judgments. San Francisco seems the ideal location to try.

Kathleen Ferraro, President

From the Editor

Division members should send contributions for the newsletter to Emily Kolker, including calls for papers, new book announcements, relevant fellowships or grants, etc. I can be reached via postal mail at Brandeis University, Department of Sociology-Mailstop 071, Waltham, MA 02454-9110 or via email at kolker@brandeis.edu.

Health, Health Policy and Health Services Sponsored Session Information for 2004 SSSP Meetings

Our division will be very active at the annual conference. We have three joint sessions (a good number) and we welcome this type of collaboration with colleagues from other divisions. We encourage all members to come to this year's conference in San Francisco, and to look decisively and collectively at health within the context of the culture of social problems. Please come to San Francisco. We look forward to seeing you all there.

Thematic Session

Cultures of Care: Familial & Formal Systems
Organizer: Valerie Leiter

Joint Sessions

The Culture of Prescribed Psychoactive Drugs
Co-sponsored with the Drinking and Drugs
Division
Organizer: Richard W. Wilsnack

Health Effects: Intersection of Race and Poverty

Co-Sponsored with the Race and Ethnic
Minorities Division

Organizers: Stephen Morewitz and Stephani
Williams

Families and the Use of Reproductive Technologies:

New Issues, Questions, and Debates

Co-Sponsored with the Family Division

Organizers: Nancy Mezey & Heather Dillaway

Regular Sessions

Feminism confronts the Genome

Organizers: Barbara Katz Rothman & Elizabeth
Ettorre

Roundtables in Health, Health Policy & Health Services

Organizer: Nancy Andes

Special 'Author Meets Critics Session'

For Jean Elson's 2003 Book: *Am I still a
Woman?: Hysterectomy and Gender Identity*.
Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Book Exhibit Recommendations Needed

The Library of Social Science will be organizing the SSSP book exhibit again this year at the annual meetings. In an effort to expand the book exhibit and ensure health-related titles are included, we are asking you to recommend recently published book titles that represent the work of their division. ***All recommendations must be sent to Nancy Andes (email: afna@uaa.alaska.edu) no later than March 15, 2004.***

The following information should be included:

Author's Name:

Book Title:

Publication Date:

Publisher:

* NOTE* If the author is recommending his or her own book, the following information should also be included: Name and Position of Main Contact at the Publishing Company (a marketing or editorial person); Work #, fax #, and e-mail address of the publisher contact.

Call for Resolutions from Division Membership

- * Should SSSP advocate for a national health care system with universal coverage?
- * As an association of scholar-activists, should SSSP pass policy recommendations aimed at resolving pressing social problems?
- * What resolutions can our Division contribute?

SSSP Divisions were asked to solicit resolutions that deal with substantive issues relevant to their substantive focus. SSSP resolutions constitute an important opportunity for our membership to publicly declare their sentiments, thereby creating a channel for greater visibility and more direct influence upon a variety of "publics," i.e., fellow activists, scholars, students, decision-makers, social action groups, voters, and others. Recent President Bob Perrucci has called upon the association to work in a more dedicated fashion in ensuring that we are making the greatest possible impact upon the larger public.

Resolutions should contain a concise position statement concerning a social problem of urgent concern to the Division. In most cases, the resolution should include some sort of call for viable action on the part of the SSSP. This typically has involved a letter from the SSSP Board directed to some public entity, expressing concern, support, or protest.

Here are some suggestions that may help enhance resolutions submitted for consideration by the Society:

Local awareness: A resolution which addresses an issue of urgent concern for the city or region where the annual meeting is taking place is highly desirable. Thus, a more general or globally-oriented resolution can be strengthened if it makes the extra effort to cite any local aspect or manifestation of the problem which can help dovetail with the larger concern. Clearly, matters of local concern are more likely to be of interest to the local media.

Urgency: Resolutions that embody some urgent or timely matter involving some current manifestation of a larger social problem are highly desirable. This can relate, for example, to pending legislation, policies and programs, a recently released report, and so on. Resolutions that address urgent matters are much more likely to be picked up by the press.

Action-oriented: All resolutions should attempt to incorporate a call for action, be it on the part of the SSSP Board, or for concerned individuals. If action is requested on the part of the SSSP, it should be as specific as possible, e.g., to whom should a letter be directed, etc. In the past, other proposed actions have included calls for boycotts, participation in public demonstrations, collecting donations, and so on.

Resource pointer: A resolution which is accompanied by a specific resource or resource list is extremely useful for those who wish to learn more about the issue at hand. The resource supplement can be a specific document or scholarly paper, website(s), or some other useful repository of information. This can be very helpful in increasing the impact of the resolution by assisting teachers, students, the press and others who wish to have further background information in engaging the issue for their own specific purposes.

Forward your suggestions for a SSSP Division of Health, Health Policy, and Health Services resolution to Nancy Andes, Co-chair (afna@uaa.alaska.edu). This summary was extracted from and additional information is available at the SSSP website (URL: www.sssp1.org).

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