

# Poverty, Class & Inequality Division

## news

### Chair's Message

Dear Poverty, Class, and Inequality Division Members:

As this is my first PCI Newsletter, I am a little unsure as to what I should include, beyond, of course, the "announcement" type items I received over the course of the past few months.

Given that our division focuses on current research and concerns about poverty, class, and inequality, it occurred to me that I might provide some information and corresponding web links related to the core issues of PCI. In that spirit, and in the spirit of doing what we all do now when we need information, I googled each of these words: poverty, social class, and inequality. What I found will probably not surprise any of you: social justice matters have not improved ... in fact, they have gotten worse. Indeed, it is sad to point out that there is still much work to be done, and it does not appear that this division will be obsolete anytime soon.

I am trying something new in this summer edition of the PCI newsletter. Beginning on page 4, I have listed the websites that I found to be provocative, as well as included embedded hyperlinks so you can easily access the full site. Right click on your mouse and select the hyperlink option. I hope you find this format interesting and helpful, and I would enjoy your feedback -- feel free to send me your thoughts at the email below.

Sincerely,

John C. Alessio  
Division Chair  
John.alessio@mnsu.edu

#### IN THIS ISSUE

Chair's Message ... 1  
Speciesism – The Next SSSP Frontier ... 1  
Announcement of Sessions for 2009 Meeting ... 2  
Member Publications ... 3

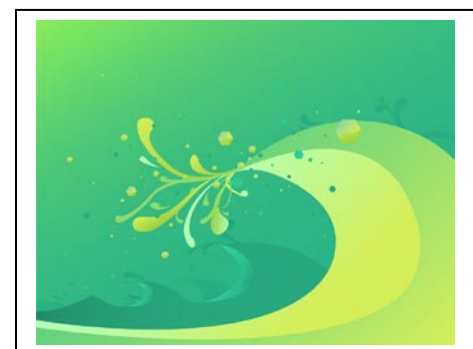
### Speciesism: The Next SSSP Frontier

As I searched for materials to include in this newsletter, it occurred to me that I might challenge the reader to think about a concept that social scientists still do not address very often. There have been recent writings about the parallels between the treatment of non-humans and the treatment of oppressed peoples. This short piece addresses the relationship between speciesism and the many other isms. Keep in mind that the best way to avoid such essays from me in the future is to send one of your own. Thank you.

*(continued on page 6)*

### Talk Back

Our newsletter is always looking for input from our members: if you have news to share, suggestions to make, or announcements to spread, please don't hesitate to send this in. We'd like to see this tool evolve to better meet the needs of our readers, so talk to us -- we value your input and feedback! Send comments/suggestions/news to Margaret Scarsdale, PCI Newsletter Editor at [jinwriter@yahoo.com](mailto:jinwriter@yahoo.com).



# Announcement of Sessions for *2009 Meeting*

## Co-Sponsored Sessions

### Session 13: Families in Poverty

Co-sponsored with Family Division  
Organizer: Mary Anne Kanieski, St. Mary's College  
[kanieski@saintmarys.edu](mailto:kanieski@saintmarys.edu)  
574-284-4517

### Session 52: Social Action to Alleviate Poverty and Inequality – Round Table

*With Michael Harrington Award Winner*  
Co-sponsored w/ Conflict, Social Action, and Change  
Organizers: Lisa Welch, Southern Illinois University,  
Edwardsville, [lwelch@siue.edu](mailto:lwelch@siue.edu)  
618-650-5894 &  
Shawn Cassiman, University of Dayton  
[cassimsa@notes.udayton.edu](mailto:cassimsa@notes.udayton.edu)  
937-229-4243

### Session 84: Targeting the Poor: Social Policy, Race, and Lived Experience

Co-sponsored with Racial & Ethnic Minorities Division  
Organizer: Lisa Welch, Southern Illinois University,  
Edwardsville  
[lwelch@siue.edu](mailto:lwelch@siue.edu)  
618-650-5894

### Session 21: Current Challenges in Teaching about Inequality Along the Color Line

Co-sponsored with Racial & Ethnic Minorities & Teaching  
Social Problems Divisions  
Organizer: Amanda Gengler, Barton College  
[agengler@barton.edu](mailto:agengler@barton.edu)

### Session 112: Social Justice, Peace, and Environment

Co-sponsored with Community Research and  
Development and Environment and Technology Divisions  
Organizer: Julie Andrezejewski, St. Cloud State  
University  
[jrandzejewski@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:jrandzejewski@stcloudstate.edu)  
320-308-4109

### Session 132: Ageism and Economic Inequality: Understanding Intersections

Co-Sponsored with Youth, Aging, and the Life Course  
Organizer: Leah Rogne, Minnesota State University,  
Mankato  
[leah.rogne@mnsu.edu](mailto:leah.rogne@mnsu.edu)  
507-389-5610

### Session 87: Inequality and Crime

Co-Sponsored with Crime and Juvenile Delinquency  
Organizers: Kim Greer, Minnesota State University,  
Mankato  
[kimberly.greer@mnsu.edu](mailto:kimberly.greer@mnsu.edu)  
507-345-5945 &  
Vicki Hunter, Minnesota State University, Mankato  
[vicki.hunter@mnsu.edu](mailto:vicki.hunter@mnsu.edu)  
330-813-6028

## Poverty, Class, and Inequality Division 2009 SSSP Sessions

We are fortunate to have all but one of our co-sponsored and PCI sponsored sessions in the 2009 SSSP meeting program. The sessions that have been successfully organized are listed on these two pages. For a full list of sessions, check out the SSSP website! [www.sssp1.org](http://www.sssp1.org)

## *Don't Miss!*

The Poverty, Class, and Inequality  
Divisional Meeting on Friday from 4:30  
pm - 6:10 pm at SCH-Stanford West

## PCI Sessions Only

### Session 32: Intersecting Inequalities: Considering the Place of Race

Organizer: Yvonne Luna, Northern Arizona University  
[Yvonne.Luna@nau.edu](mailto:Yvonne.Luna@nau.edu)  
928-523-6135 &  
Jennifer Wesely, University of North Florida  
[jwesely@unf.edu](mailto:jwesely@unf.edu)  
904-620-1685

### Session 52: Inequality and Animal Rights

Organizer: Anthony Nocella, Syracuse University  
[nocellat@yahoo.com](mailto:nocellat@yahoo.com)  
315-657-2911

### Session 14: Alternative Economic Systems: Breaking the Barriers of "Free Market" Capitalism

Organizer: John C. Alessio, Minnesota State University,  
Mankato  
[john.alessio@mnsu.edu](mailto:john.alessio@mnsu.edu)  
507-389-5717



## Member Publications

*America at Risk: The Crisis of Hope, Trust, and Caring.* Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

By: Robert Perrucci and Carolyn Cummings Perrucci,

In "America at Risk: The Crisis of Hope, Trust, and Caring," Robert Perrucci and Carolyn C. Perrucci identify the broad economic and technological changes that have led to the loss of high wage jobs, declining opportunity, and increased income and wealth inequality. Taking data from a thirty-year period, Perrucci and Perrucci apply a critical sociological lens to view the dominant economic, political, and cultural institutions that cause the main social problems affecting Americans.

[http://shop4.vcomshop.com/America-at-Risk-Anthropology\\_stcVVproductId63015418VVcatId13530VVvIEWprod.htm](http://shop4.vcomshop.com/America-at-Risk-Anthropology_stcVVproductId63015418VVcatId13530VVvIEWprod.htm)

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Mezey, Nancy J. 2008. The Privilege of Coming Out: Race, Class, and Lesbians' Mothering Decisions. *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Autumn), pp. 257-275.

*Social Justice, Peace, and Environmental Education: Transformative Standards*

Edited by Julie Andrzejewski, Marta Baltodano, & Linda Symcox

The concept of "standards" seems antithetical to the ways critical educators are dedicated to teaching, but what would "standards" look like if they were generated from social justice perspectives and through collaborative and inclusive processes? Such is the central question posed by the contributors of this groundbreaking collection on the interconnectivity of social justice, peace, and environmental preservation. Challenging education that promotes consumerism, careerism, and corporate profiteering, they boldly offer examples of a new paradigm for practicing a transformative critical pedagogy. Rather than just talking about coalition building within and across educational communities, they demonstrate how we might communicate from different vantage points and disciplinary boundaries to create a broader picture of social and eco-justice. *Social Justice, Peace, and Environmental Education* will be required reading for educators and students who want to envision and practice living, acting, and teaching for a better world.

### *Critical Sociology*

By: Steven M. Buechler

All sociology is implicitly critical because the sociological perspective questions and debunks what common sense takes for granted. Some sociology is explicitly critical of how the domination of states, corporations, the media, or other powerful institutions attenuate our potential for living autonomous lives in today's world.

In *Critical Sociology*, Buechler explores sociology's double critique. The book opens with chapters on how to think sociologically, an overview of the scientific, humanistic and critical schools of sociology, and a more detailed exposition of the critical tradition. He applies this critical tradition to economics, politics and culture, to class, race and gender, to individualism, self and identity, and to globalization, social movements and democracy.

The result is a sophisticated introduction to the sociological perspective that highlights the distinctiveness of the discipline and accents the role of critique in that perspective. The book could be suitable for introductory and social problems classes as well as a range of substantive courses that typically comprise the undergraduate major in sociology.

Steven M. Buechler, Professor of Sociology at Minnesota State University, is the author of *Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism* (Oxford University Press).

### *Praise for "Critical Sociology" ...*

"A well-written and accessible introduction to critical sociology. It manages to be strong theoretically and to deal with some of the most pressing social issues of the day from a well-developed critical perspective." – George Ritzer.

*Critical Sociology* is a very well-written, very well thought out, careful, and sophisticated book. The material is clearly presented, the arguments are well thought through." – Michael Kimmel

## POVERTY

- Almost half the world — over 3 billion people — live on less than \$2.50 a day.
- The GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the 41 Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (567 million people) is less than the wealth of the world's 7 richest people combined.
- Nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names.
- Less than one per cent of what the world spent every year on weapons was needed to put every child into school by the year 2000 and yet it didn't happen.
- 1 billion children live in poverty (1 in 2 children in the world). 640 million live without adequate shelter, 400 million have no access to safe water, and 270 million have no access to health services. 10.6 million died in 2003 before they reached the age of 5 (or roughly 29,000 children per day).

Find out More:

- Poverty Facts and Stats at: [More Facts \(and Sources\) »](#)
- <http://www.globalissues.org/issue/2/causes-of-poverty>

## STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT – A MAJOR CAUSE OF POVERTY

Cutbacks in health, education and other vital social services around the world have resulted from structural adjustment policies prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank as conditions for loans and repayment. In addition, developing nation governments are required to open their economies to compete with each other and with more powerful and established industrialized nations. To attract investment, poor countries enter a spiraling race to the bottom to see who can provide lower standards, reduced wages and cheaper resources. This has increased poverty and inequality for most people. It also forms a backbone to what we today call globalization. As a result, it maintains the historic unequal rules of trade.

- Read "[Structural Adjustment—a Major Cause of Poverty](#)" to learn more.

## POVERTY AROUND THE WORLD

Inequality is increasing around the world while the world appears to globalize. Even the wealthiest nation has the largest gap between rich and poor compared to other developed nations. In many cases, international politics and various interests have led to a diversion of available resources from domestic needs to western markets. Historically, politics and power play by the elite leaders and rulers have increased poverty and dependency. These have often manifested themselves in wars, hot and cold, which have often been trade- and resource-related. Mercantilist practices, while presented as free trade, still happen today. Poverty is therefore not just an economic issue, it is also an issue of political economics.

- Read "[Poverty Around The World](#)" to learn more.

## TODAY, OVER 26,500 CHILDREN DIED AROUND THE WORLD

Around the world, 27,000 to 30,000 children die every day. That is equivalent to 1 child dying every 3 seconds, 20 children dying every minute, a 2004 Asian Tsunami occurring almost every week, or 10–11 million children dying every year. Over 50 million children died between 2000 and 2005. The silent killers are poverty, easily preventable diseases and illnesses, and other related causes. In spite of the scale of this daily/ongoing catastrophe, it rarely manages to achieve, much less sustain, prime-time, headline coverage.

- Read "[Today, over 26,500 children died around the world](#)" to learn more.
- <http://www.globalissues.org/issue/2/causes-of-poverty>

## SOCIAL CLASS

When I googled "social class" one of the first sites to come up was the one below. It is a little slide show representing aspects of social class over periods of time. It is a little on the lighter side, but try it. There is one sequence that begs the question of what is the relationship between social class and sexism – or should I say classism and sexism. What do you think?

[http://www.nytimes.com/packages/khtml/2005/05/29/national/class/20050529\\_CLASSTIMELINE\\_GRAPHIC.html?scp=7&sq="class+matters"&st=m](http://www.nytimes.com/packages/khtml/2005/05/29/national/class/20050529_CLASSTIMELINE_GRAPHIC.html?scp=7&sq=)

## INEQUALITY

### Income

The top one percent of households received 21.8 percent of all pre-tax income in 2005, more than double what that figure was in the 1970s. (The top one percent's share of total income bottomed out at 8.9 percent in 1976.)

This is the greatest concentration of income since 1928, when 23.9 percent of all income went to the richest one percent. ([Piketty and Saez](#))

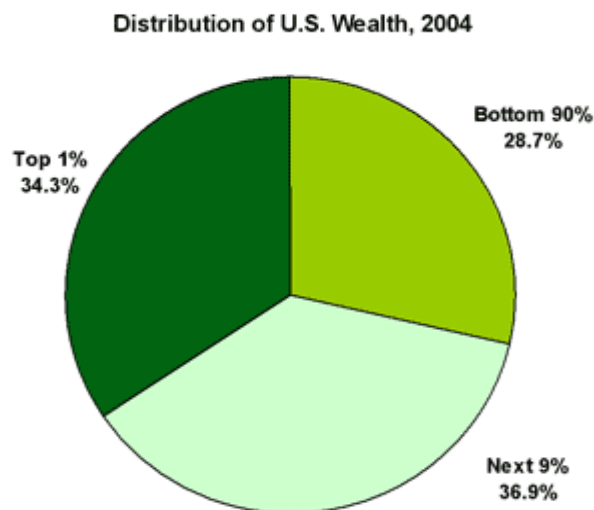
Between 1979 and 2005, the top five percent of American families saw their real incomes increase 81 percent. Over the same period, the lowest-income fifth saw their real incomes decline 1 percent. ([Census Bureau](#))

All of the income gains in 2005 went to the top 10 percent of households, while the bottom 90 percent of households saw income declines. ([EPI Snapshot](#), March 28, 2007)

### Wealth

In 1962, the wealth of the richest one percent of U.S. households was roughly 125 times greater than that of the typical household. By 2004, it was 190 times (EPI, State of Working America 2006-07, Figure 5B).

The richest one percent of U.S. households now owns 34.3 percent of the nation's private wealth, more than the combined wealth of the bottom 90 percent. The top one percent also owns 36.9 percent of all corporate stock (EPI, State of Working America 2006-07, Table 5.1 and Figure 5F).



**Source:** Economic Policy Institute, State of Working America 2006-07, Table 5.1, citing Wolff (2006).

[Download high resolution TIF](#)

# Speciesism: The Next SSSP Frontier

(Continued from page 1)

It is often assumed that the relevant beginning of the isms lies with human prejudices toward other humans. This limited position is not only inaccurate in itself, but results in an analysis of the human exploitation process that is incomplete and, therefore, also inaccurate. Taking a human prejudice-based disposition toward the history of the isms contributes to the various forms of human discrimination being seen solely from the standpoint of White against Black, Black against Asian, Irish against Italian, Italian against Latino(a), male against female, able bodied against people with disabilities, young against old, straight against gay, Jew against non-Jew etc. These oppositional human categories are artificially created and direct attention away from the primary source of discrimination and oppression i.e., greed directed toward labor and resource exploitation.

## Speciesism

One of the most important, and perhaps most often overlooked, realities of life is that living beings require sustenance that can only be attained from the consumption of other living beings, or matter that comes from other living beings. This is not a particularly profound statement in itself, but it is profound in its implications for understanding oppression.

We tend to assume that our current state of dualistic thinking about which humans are valued and which are not valued has always been as it is today—human group against human group. As individuals growing up in a particular culture, humans do quickly internalize the divisions that are taught them from birth. But from where do those divisions come? How did the culture itself come to have these divisions imbedded into its many belief patterns and institutions? Where did the process of differentiation and use of “other” start?

This brings us to the topic of speciesism. Drawing on the conceptualization of William Graham Sumner and other sociologists that followed, we can consider the language being used to define which species of life should and should not be eaten and/or captured for various human uses as representing a form of in-group and out-group distinctions. In-group/out-group behavior is any action or tendency that separates beings with a particular set of characteristics from beings that do not have the exact same characteristics. Those beings considered to have the desired characteristics are members of the in-group, and all other beings are

members of out-groups. In-group members are treated with general positive regard while out-group members are treated with suspicion and possible contempt—often as an enemy to be controlled or even destroyed.

Speciesism, therefore, is the tendency for members of one species to view and/or treat members of another species as inferior in a specific or general way. Speciesism, like all isms, means that a self identified in-group (in this case a species) claims the right to make judgments about an out-group species, and the out-group species does not have the same opportunity or tendency.

What is the earliest and most basic way in which human and non-human organisms have used other forms of life? Most fundamentally humans have used other forms of life as food and, thereby, as a means of sustaining themselves. How does one form of life decide that another form of life can or should be used for one’s own purposes? With respect to food, there is, of course, a nutritional component which is worked out over time—most likely in a trial and error fashion, and originally with a relatively low level of objective consciousness about the meaning of the activity—as humans developed a greater ability to objectify themselves

## Speciesism: The Next SSSP Frontier

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relative to the world around them. Accentuating separateness has made it easier to justify the use of other objects to satisfy perceived personal needs.

### Ahimsa

Over time some human groups, such as the Jainas, Hindus, and Buddhists came to question the extent to which life forms are truly separate; seeing all of the earth's components as part of their own being, and hence inseparable through time and space from their own welfare. Out of this way of looking at the world came the concept of ahimsa, which refers to an unwillingness to harm any living being.

Many Native American peoples also developed an integrated view of the world; seeing all parts of the universe as pieces of their own life, both physically and spiritually. They did not, however, incorporate ahimsa as did the Eastern religious groups mentioned above.

The Jainas, Hindus, and Buddhists, while seemingly more protective of non-human life than the Native Americans, face the eternal dilemma of what humans should eat if they are going to truly practice ahimsa.

Invariably these groups create artificial classification systems for ranking forms of life into "higher" and "lower" categories.

The Jainas, for example, created a classification system based on their belief about which forms of life have the greatest number of senses. They viewed plants as having fewer senses than other forms of life, which made plants the least harmed (in the sense of pain experience) by being eaten.

Thinking of life forms as lower and higher tends to work against the notion of true ahimsa and the belief that all of life is interconnected in a horizontal fashion.

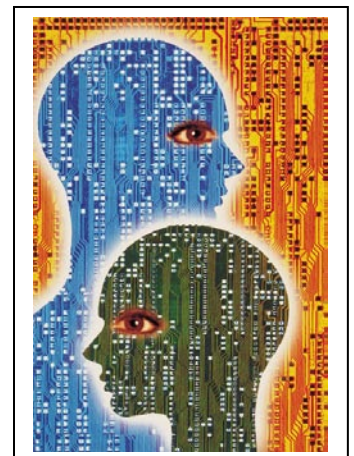
### Western Tendencies and Life

There is among many Western peoples direct or indirect satisfaction with the notion of killing other forms of life. The process of killing other forms of life may involve the infliction of prolonged pain and suffering upon those beings—typically with no notable remorse or regret. This kind of disposition toward other forms of life manifests itself most notably in the form of hunting for "sport", through factory farming, and through frequent viewing of violent entertainment where death and destruction are commonplace.

This kind of behavior and mental disposition can only come about if people are taught to think of themselves as completely separate beings from the other beings of the universe. This separateness most likely started with the need to take in sustenance, but in Western cultures, especially, evolved into something far more encompassing.

If we think of the fabric of life being made up of threads close to and like ourselves as well as threads further away and less like ourselves, we can more easily think of differences between life forms without imposing hierarchical value upon them.

What is closest to us on the fabric, in terms of appearance and DNA, would be life forms that share the threads that run through us, and as we move further away in the fabric we find greater differences from ourselves in appearances and composition. Differences do



## Speciesism: The Next SSSP Frontier

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not have to translate into artificial magnitude or value—more pain, less pain—more important, less important. They simply are what they are: differences.

So what about sustenance... don't we have to separate ourselves from what we eat? While we obviously would gain nothing by trying to eat ourselves, when we think about that question seriously, the answer should be straightforward. Nothing becomes more a part of us than what we eat. We, therefore, cannot separate ourselves from what we eat—at least not what we have eaten. The “food” (life) that we ingest today literally becomes part of us tomorrow. The common expression “you are what you eat” is meaningful from a number of points of view. We know we must take in something outside of ourselves in order to survive. All life regenerates from the “consumption” of other life. While the consumption of a being destroys that life in its present form, important components of that life reemerge in some other being.

### Is Speciesism Necessary For Humans to Survive?

Consumption does not require denigration of the source of what we kill and eat. We know from the practices of some communities of people that the sources of their food may be considered sacred e.g., the buffalo for certain Native American tribes, and corn for others. Which approach makes more sense: revering that which sustains me, or denigrating what I eat as an inferior life form? This is not a frivolous intellectual question. The answer has serious consequences for all forms of life; including humans. Denigrating other beings to justify eating them opens the door to denigrating other beings for other uses as well. If I think of something as inferior in order to feel good about eating it, why shouldn't I feel comfortable using it for other purposes—after all “it is just a dumb animal anyway—right?”

Students of human inequality might see the same question as relevant to their critical analysis of human group differences. Considerable resources are expended each year to demonstrate the inferiority or superiority of certain human groups. The resulting research findings help many humans feel alright about the racial disparities in prisons, the use of humans for cheap/slave labor, and the direct and enforced subservience of some humans to others.

The uses of other life forms have been extended well beyond the necessity of sustenance – as have the uses (“cooperatively” or exploitatively) of other humans.

The imperative of life and the corresponding need to survive do not require justification by use of any set of standards. People generally do not question a being's right to preserve its own life. How one chooses to survive, however, is subject to examination and debate as to its legality, morality, and efficacy. While survival minimally requires taking the lives of other beings, one need not view taking life for food as an expression of one's superiority. Indeed, taking the lives of other beings in order to survive is more realistically done out of one's own sense of vulnerability based on the need to live. That which saves us from death should not be considered inferior to us, but at the very least should be considered our equal.

*Green Theory and Praxis: The Journal of Ecopedagogy* has recently published an article on this topic:

<http://greentheoryandpraxis.ecopedagogy.org/index.php/journal/issue/current>

