

Social Problems Theory News

Society for the Study
of Social Problems



Theory Division Chair 2004-06

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The Society for the Study of Social Problems has offered a forum for alternative voices within sociology and the social sciences. We have served as a leading scholarly/activist organization in the social sciences, fighting for justice, freedom, and equity, sometimes against long odds. Through its annual meeting and its journal, Social Problems, SSSP has supported the best of scholarship, characterized by theoretical and methodological creativity and with a focus on key social issues. Moreover, SSSP is proud of its history as an open, progressive organization, committed to scholarly activism, and welcoming the participation of graduate students to distinguished senior scholars.

**Gary A. Fine, SSSP
President**

Message from the Chair

The main purpose of this Spring Newsletter is to invite you all to come to Philadelphia to join us at the **2005 Annual Meetings** of our Society for the Study of Social Problems. Under the presidency of **Gary Fine**, these meetings promise to be especially exciting. Here are additional reasons for Theory Division members to come.

Four theory panels

Most importantly, as your Division Chair I am delighted to inform you of four panels we sponsor. I enjoyed corresponding with some of you to put three panels together. I also greatly appreciated **Ted Goertzel's** efforts in organizing one of our panels.

I very much look forward then to hearing these four sets of papers (plus one video collage). All look most promising.

The Nature of Institutions and Claims Making: Public and Private Mass Media and Other Comparisons will examine the impact that institutional arrangements have in shaping the definition of social problems. A particular focus will be on the public sphere, the role mass media play, including media in inter-city comparison.

Constructing Social Problems Solutions: Successes, Failures, and Unintended Consequences is our thematic session. It will take a constructivist approach toward the theme of the meetings, the consequences of social problems solutions.

Constructing Social Problems: Innovative Ideas presents us with innovations of the constructivist theme. We will experience the urgent application of old ideas to new issues, and we will encounter paradoxes that confront us with limits of our past work. Last but not least, Ted Goertzel organized a most promising panel entitled

Social Problems Theory and Sociological Theory: Differences, Specifications, Relationships. Clearly, we have to ask what the distinctive merit of Social Problems Theory is vis-à-vis the theorizing that goes on in other areas of sociology. Papers in this session work toward answering that question. You find details on topics and speakers below.

Business meeting

Importantly, **please join us at the Social Problems Theory Division's Business Meeting.** It will be held on **Friday, August 12 from 4:30pm - 6:10pm in room Liberty A.** We will be discussing future directions the Division might take and think about topics and initiatives for the upcoming academic year. The business meeting will also give us an opportunity to hand out the Division Awards (the committee is working diligently) and to congratulate the winners. Please mark this as well as the panels in your calendars. I much hope to see many of you on all of those occasions.

Philadelphia

There are many reasons to come to Philadelphia, beyond the SSSP meetings. The ASA Meetings overlap with ours. And, given the much more inclusive nature of ASA compared to the days in which SSSP was founded, there is much that we all can learn there as well. Just before SSSP, the International Congress of Criminology will also meet in Philadelphia, for those interested in criminological issues.

Finally, the city itself is well worth a visit. You find lots of information in the respective newsletters about the famous national sites where American history is preserved and continuously being (re-)constructed. Of equal interest to SSSP members is Philadelphia as the site of DuBois' early work on the life of African Americans and of Anderson's famous walk along Germantown Avenue (in *Code of the Street*), a true SSSP visitor's guide through the manifold transitions from the inner city to the suburb-like outskirts of the city.

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Four Exciting Sessions Sponsored by the SP Theory Division

The Nature of Institutions and Claims Making: Public and Private Mass Media and Other Comparisons

Friday, August 12

Room: Independence A

10:30am - 12:10pm

Sponsor: Social Problems Theory Division

Organizer & Presider: Joachim J. Savelsberg, University of Minnesota

Papers:

“Public Opinion, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: From Critique to Action,” Martha Crum, Graduate Center/City University of New York

“Political Media after the Public Sphere,” Craig Willse, Graduate Center/City University of New York

“Foucaultian Analysis of Homelessness in Two US Cities,” Bart W. Miles, Wayne State University

“Theatrical Solutions and Social Problems: A Critique of Media Culture,” Alem Kebede, California State University, Bakersfield

Constructing Social Problems Solutions: Successes, Failures, and Unintended Consequences

Friday, August 12

Room: Independence A

12:30am - 2:10pm

Sponsor: Social Problems Theory Division

Organizer & Presider: Joachim J. Savelsberg, University of Minnesota

Papers:

“Who Can Study Blowback and Why? Using Policy Advocates as a Case Example,” Mirella Landriscina, University of Pennsylvania

“Social Problems Solutions, Frames, and Natural Histories,” Timothy Kubal, California State University, Fresno

“William James and MLK--Using ‘Worldview’ to Understand the Unintended Consequences of Social Problem Solutions,” Michael J. Coyle, Arizona State University

“Being Burnt at the Stake and Other Unintended Consequences: Toward a Heretical Sociology,” Michelle Corbin, University of Maryland

Constructing Social Problems: Innovative Ideas

Saturday, August 13

Room: Delaware

2:30am - 4:10 pm

Sponsor: Social Problems Theory Division

Organizer & Presider: Joachim J. Savelsberg, University of Minnesota

Papers:

“*The Construction of ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction,’*” Harry W. Murray, Nazareth College

“*The Disadvantage of a Good Reputation: Disney as a Target for Social Problems Claims,*” Joel Best, University of Delaware

“*Pushing the Limits: Bringing Creativity to Sociological Discourse,*” Autumn Green, Boston College

“*The Medicalization/Criminalization of Sexual Violence and Alcohol Abuse on Campus: The Weaving of THE RED Light Districts, WHITE Lies, AND BLUE Light Specials,*” Edith (Edie) Fisher and Robert F. Wait, Western Michigan University

“*Moral Decline as a Social Problem,*” David R. Simon, University of North Florida

Social Problems Theory and Sociological Theory: Differences, Specifications, Relationships

Sunday, August 14

Room: Independence A

12:30am - 2:10 pm

Sponsor: Social Problems Theory Division

Organizer & Presider: Ted Goertzel, Rutgers University

Papers:

“*Social Problems Formula Stories and Movement Discourse: Avenues for Theoretical Development,*” Valerie Gunter, The University of New Orleans

“*Social Troubles: Getting Beyond Personal Troubles vs. Public Issue,*” Gale Miller, Marquette University

“*Loisada (Lower East Side Story): Children Dancing Under the Williamsburg Bridge,*” Susan Cavin, Rhonda Levy, Stuart Pyle, Mark DeGarmo, Maria Mitchell and Noralyn Ebrahim, New York University

“*Rethinking Empathy,*” Anthony Buttarro, City University of New York

“*Theorizing Substance Abuse,*” Suzanne Kurth and Elizabeth Husky, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR NEWSLETTER

In the previous edition of this newsletter I wrote above about the role institutional arrangements play for the production of scholarly knowledge. SSSP and its Theory Division are specific institutional arrangements. I would like to invite you again to send brief notes **on the specific role you think SSSP and the Theory Division play vis-à-vis social science theorizing** that occurs elsewhere, for example in ASA’s Theory Section. What particular type of theory has a better chance at being produced here – and why? Or, more provocatively, what would be lost if our SSSP Theory Division disappeared? I would like to publish such notes in the upcoming newsletter. J.J.S.