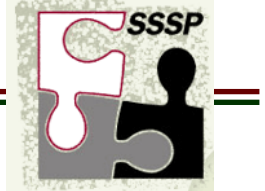


Social Problems Theory News

Society for the Study of Social Problems



Theory Division Chair 2006-08

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“Unrepentant positivism’s arrogance, of course, is that it insists on the preeminence of ‘objective reality’ while denigrating as mere interference or contamination any representational or interpretive static that intervenes between the obdurate world and its scientific descriptions. In contrast, radical postmodernism’s conceit is to ‘write off’ reality by single-mindedly insisting that representation be given its due. Somewhere in between, we should be able to locate options for reclaiming reality without discounting representation, for acknowledging that reality is not merely given, but constructed. While we are compelled to investigate rhetorical production, we can’t afford to ignore the substantive aspects of what is received and what is produced in the end.”

*J.F. Gubrium and J.A. Holstein.
The New Language of Qualitative Method
Oxford University Press-1997-p112*

Message from the chair

Greetings, Theory Fans:

Let’s talk about us for a minute. In looking at our Division’s annual meeting sessions lately, one consistent theme emerges: “What is Social Problems Theory?” It seems that we are – I think appropriately – doing a little navel gazing.

Specifically: At the 2005 meetings in Philadelphia, Ted Goertzel (Rutgers U.) organized a session at which three papers were presented coalescing around the question “what is distinctive about Social Problems Theory?” The title of the session was “Social Problems Theory vs. Sociological Theory: Differences, Specifications, Relationships.”

At the recent 2006 meetings in Montreal, Lara Foley (U. Tulsa) put together a session addressing how critical social thought might impact a field that has lately been led by constructivist theorizing. This session was entitled “Against Fossilized Social Problems Theory: Opening the Door to New Directions in Sociological Theory.” Lara will be organizing another session in 2007.

Here is glimpse of some of the action:

1) Michele Corbin (U Maryland) cut right to the heart of the matter in her paper “Social Problems Theory: Fossilized, Fractionalized, or Fraternalized?” The paper raised a number of interesting questions, with the general goal of urging social problems theorists to become more engaged, as a group, with the “progressive intellectualism” of traditions of theory such as critical race, feminist, and post-colonialist. Michele is now requesting papers for an entire 2007 session along these lines (see the Call for Papers below).

2) Kathe Lowney (Valdosta St.) addressed the question of how our theorizing on “selves” as situationally accomplished complexes of race, gender, sexuality, class, sub-culture, religion, *et cetera*, might add a useful perspective to scholarship on “multiple identity disorder.”

3) In another paper, Alison Grace Cliath (Washington St.), looking at social action regarding environmental concerns, suggested a “comprehensive practical theory” rooted in the notion of “navigational strategies” that could and should be used systematically to “improve our ability to give sociological advice on how to better

navigate unrecognized, unintended, and emergent social-environmental concerns.”

4) Finally, in “Third World Critiques of Western Feminist Theory in the Post-Development Era,” Javier Pereira Bruno (U Texas-Austin) provided a detailed analysis of the concern that Western feminism could not possibly provide a model for Third World Feminism because of vast contextual differences, and that presuming that it did was more than merely wrong but dangerously counterproductive for the conditions of women in developing nations.

BUT WAIT! We are not done yet. We will be continuing this line of inquiry during 2007 at our New York meetings. Joel Best (U. Delaware) and Kathe Lowney (Valdosta St.) will be organizing a session entitled “What is Social Problems Theory? Past, Present, Future.” Details are presented below in the Call for Papers.

Suffice it to say that this is a developing conversation. Clearly, we have many in our membership who are wondering about the big questions – who are we – why are we, in all our diversity, in *this* Division, together? What, if anything, *is* social problems theory and where is it going? (Theory: what is it good for?)

While I certainly have my own views on this, I really consider all of this curiosity (or restlessness) a mandate to pursue my “campaign promise” to query our membership on similar questions. I plan to undertake this project over my first year as Chair, and then report back to the membership during the second year. I am currently developing ideas about how to proceed. There are of course very limited resources available for this project (i.e. none) and I would welcome suggestions – e.g. on what specific questions might be addressed, and how.

I cannot conclude my first Chair’s Message without thanking my esteemed predecessor, Joachim Savelsberg. Joachim has been of great help during the transition, which was complicated by my absence at the meetings in Montreal (due to the birth of my son). I also must thank Mary Drew of University of Minnesota for generously supplying me with the template for this Newsletter’s format, which she developed. And of course nothing gets done without Michele Koontz.

Mitch Berbrier,
November 2006

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Montréal 2006



In Montreal, there were seven (!!) Theory Division sessions. The organizers were **Lara Foley (Tulsa)** who took care of three sessions, **Tim Kubal (Cal. St. Sacramento)** who organized two sessions, and our **Division Chair, Joachim Savelsberg (Minnesota)**, who also worked a pair of sessions. They reported that the sessions went rather smoothly, with only one "no-show" among the more than two dozen participants who were slated to present.

Attendance was variable, of course, but overall relatively strong. Lara Foley indicated that even her 8:30 a.m. session on the first day of the conference garnered a respectable audience. Joachim Savelsberg indicated that the two consecutive sessions that he chaired on collective memory became a "mini-conference" and among the best experiences of the five days.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to Tim, Lara, and Joachim, and not just regarding these sessions: Each of these colleagues are among our most active members and have put a good bit of time and effort in on behalf of our division in recent years. THANKS!!



*Fall Foliage at
Beaver Lake on
Mount Royal*

Social Problems Theory Best Student Paper Award 2006 Winners

The winners of our 2006 Student Paper Competition were announced in the Spring newsletter, and the awards were formally presented at our 2006 Division Business meeting in Montreal.

Once again, the winning paper was written by **Edward Walker**, a graduate student at the **University of Pennsylvania**. The paper was entitled "**Polity Membership, Movement Cultures, and Iron Laws: Three Types of Institutionalization in Social Movement Theory.**" Ed received a cash award of \$150 plus free registration and a ticket to our banquet at the 2006 meetings. Ed will also be organizing one of our sessions at next year's meetings.

In second place was a paper entitled "**The e-Rise and Fall of Social Problems: The Blogosphere as a Public Arena,**" authored by **University of Delaware** graduate student **Ray Maratea**, who received \$100 plus registration and banquet. Congratulations to you both! (If you are interested, abstracts for both papers were published in our Spring newsletter as well. This can be accessed on our website). We look forward to equally impressive contributions in the upcoming year.

The Division once again thanks **Tim Kubal (chair)**, **Axel Groenemeyer**, and **Karen Lutfey** for their great work on the Award Committee.

The announcement for the 2007 Competition is on the next page.

Question:

Aside from being members of our Division, what do all of these people have in common?

Mitch Berbrier * Joel Best * Kendal Broad * Kathy Charmaz * Jaber Gubrium * Scott Harris * Jim Holstein * Peter Ibarra * Annulla Linders * Judith Lorber * Donileen Loseke * Kathleen Lowney * Stephen Pfohl * Gale Miller * Leslie Miller * Darin Weinberg

Answer: They're all busy contributing chapters to the *Handbook of Constructionist Research*,

edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, forthcoming from Guilford Publications.

Other luminaries and SSSP stalwarts among the contributors: Paul Atkinson, Art Bochner, Sara Crawley, Carolyn Ellis, Ken and Mary Gergen, Helen Ingram, Michael Lynch, George Marcus, Barbara Marshall, Amir Marvasti, Liza McCoy, Jonathan Potter, Sal Restivo, Anne Schneider, Joseph Schneider, Bryan Turner, and Stanton Wortham.

Keep an eye open for the volume in summer 2007.

2007 Student Competition Call for Papers

The Social Problems Theory Division of the SSSP invites papers for its annual Student Paper Award Competition. To be eligible, papers must be authored or co-authored by students, have relevance to social problems theory, and cannot have been accepted for publication. Papers co-authored with faculty are not eligible. Self-nominations are welcome. Please limit manuscripts to 25 double-spaced pages (not including references). The 1st prize winner will receive \$150, and the 2nd prize winner will receive \$100. Both winners will also have their meeting registration fees paid and receive a banquet ticket for the 2007 Annual Meeting.

Please send submissions as email attachments to the Student Paper Competition Committee Chair, Wayne Brekhus (U Missouri), brekhusw@missouri.edu. The other members of the committee are Scott Harris (St. Louis U) and Kathleen Lowney (Valdosta St.).

Deadline for submissions: April 1, 2007.

THE 2007 CALL FOR PAPERS SOCIAL PROBLEMS THEORY DIVISION SESSIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

Papers are due on midnight EST on January 31, 2007,
and must be submitted to the Session Organizer(s),
using the SSSP Online Submission Cover Sheet (www.sssp1.org)

What is Social Problems Theory? Past, Present, Future

Organizers:

Joel Best

University of Delaware

joelbest@udel.edu

(Organizers request that submissions be sent to Best.)

and

Kathleen Lowney

Valdosta State University

Description: Sometimes we get so caught up in the current literature that we lose our perspective. This session will be a moment to take a step back and understand the development of social problems theory in general and more specifically, within the SSSP. It can be difficult to move forward – interpersonally or theoretically – without understanding our roots. We are looking for papers that look backwards in order to help us move forward theoretically. At the same time, we are also interested in papers that seek to advance social problems theory by suggesting new directions for developing the field.

Constructing Social Problems through Scholarship

Organizer:

Edward T. Walker

Pennsylvania State University

edwalker@psu.edu

Description: Social problems scholarship goes beyond merely examining issues that are widely designated as “problems,” in that it also plays a foundational role in the very construction and framing of issues. As teachers, researchers, and theorists of social problems, scholars play a key role in the creation and diffusion of knowledge, cultural beliefs, and ideologies about social events and issues. Scholars, therefore, both reproduce and challenge existing societal understandings of what constitutes a “social problem.” Papers in this session should address the role of scholarship, understood broadly, in the construction of social problems. Papers submitted to this session might consider, although they need not be limited to, some of the following questions: In what specific areas of social problems inquiry have scholars been innovative in challenging accepted definitions? Is the role of the analyst of social problems to present a normative challenge to accepted and/or hegemonic understandings of social issues? Does scholarship tend to focus on issues that find widespread public consensus on their problematic nature, or does it instead take up issues that are marginal to public discourse

THEMATIC SESSION:

Does Research Matter?

Critical Reflections on Social Science and Pursuits of Justice

Organizer:

Michelle Corbin

University of Maryland, College Park

mcorbin@socy.umd.edu

Description: For this session we seek papers which address fundamental questions regarding power and the implications of research for the pursuit of social justice. Critical sociologists have held that sociologists ought not pursue research merely to describe the world, but to make a difference. They have therefore been concerned with whether research actually does make a difference, and if it does, exactly how and for whom does it make a difference? That is, does research ameliorate social injustice or merely reinforce already problematic power structures? If research is to make a difference, which issues should it address? Who should do it, and on whose behalf? And shouldn't theorists of social problems do a better job of addressing these questions as among their central concerns? Those are but some of the questions that could be addressed.

and OUR CO-SPONSORED SESSIONS

Teaching Students to Integrate Theory & Research with Social Problems Theory

(Co-sponsored with the Teaching Social Problems Division)

Organizer:
Susan C. Warner
Cedarville University
warners@cedarville.edu

Description: none available.

‘Scientists Have Discovered...’ Disseminating Research through Media.

(Co-sponsored with the Health, Health Policies, and Health Services,
and Crime and Juvenile Delinquency Divisions)

Organizers:
Lara Foley
University of Tulsa
lara-foley@utulsa.edu

and
Jessie Daniels
Hunter College
jdaniels@hunter.cuny.edu

Description: Scientific research typically plays a role in the construction of social problems. Often researchers themselves have very little say in how research findings are used and consumed outside of the academic and/or scientific community (although some groups of researchers are becoming quite savvy in disseminating research findings). This session will explore how scientific research and information is used by the media, activists, moral entrepreneurs, educators, and politicians and how it is understood (or not understood) by the general public.

Global Integration: Exploring the Roles and Capacities of Nations and States in the Era of Globalization

(Co-sponsored with the Global Division)

Organizer: Cory Blad
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville
cblad@siue.edu

Description: The goal for this session is to better understand the responsibilities and the roles of national populations and state institutions in our contemporary world. Are national popular movements gaining power? How? Why? Are state institutions actually weakening in the face of neoliberal hegemony? Is nationalism an effective mobilization strategy in this era? Has the idea of a nation-state lost its traditional meaning? In short, what is the contemporary relationship between national populations and respective states particularly as the relationship is increasingly influenced by global political, economic, and cultural factors?

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Editor, *Social Problems*

The Editorial and Publications Committee of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) is searching for the next Editor of *Social Problems*. The three-year term of the new Editor will begin at mid-year 2008 with responsibility for editing Volumes 56-58 (years 2009-2011). All members of the SSSP are encouraged to apply or nominate colleagues.

The Editor is responsible for soliciting, reviewing, and making final decisions on manuscripts, and for preparing four issues of the journal for publication annually. The editorial office is responsible for managing the review process and for copy editing and proofreading in accordance with customary publishing standards.

The SSSP seeks an individual with a distinguished scholarly record, previous editorial experience (e.g., service as a journal editor or associate editor), strong organizational and management skills, an ability to work well with others, and a familiarity with and commitment to *Social Problems*.

The SSSP supports the editorial office with an annual budget and provides a modest stipend and travel expenses for the Editor. Support is also expected from the host institution. This support may include office space, utilities, the use of computers and other office equipment, stipends and tuition waivers for office personnel, faculty release time, and other basic expenses. Each year the Editor will be expected to submit a budget to the SSSP to cover operating expenses that the host institution does not support.

Applications, requests for further information, or names of potential nominees should be sent to: James D. Orcutt, Chair, SSSP Editorial and Publications Committee, Department of Sociology, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2270; [850] 644-6416 (Office); [850] 644-6208 (FAX); email: jorcutt@fsu.edu

CONTRIBUTE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

Comments and information from the membership are welcome. Let us know your reactions to this newsletter, to events at the annual meetings, or inform us of your new work so we can help spread the word.

Mitch Berbrier, berbrim@uah.edu

