

# Social Problems Theory News

Society for the Study of Social Problems



## Theory Division Chair 2004-06

**Joachim J. Savelsberg**  
 Department of Sociology  
 909 Social Sciences  
 University of Minnesota  
 Minneapolis, MN 55455  
 Office: 612-624-0273  
 FAX: 612-624-7020  
 E-Mail:  
 savelsbg@atlas.socsci.umn.edu

*"[F]ailures to recognize collective traumas... do not result from the intrinsic nature of the original suffering... The failure stems, rather, from an inability to carry through ... the trauma process."*

J. Alexander  
*Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*  
 California University Press-2004-p. 26f

*"The state is a central player... in that it provides new scripts, models, and practices of social control... [P]olicy shifts... directly aimed at the academic organization of criminological work... Reorganization of the academic field was associated with remarkable shifts in knowledge produced by criminological researchers..."*

J. Savelsberg, L. Cleveland, R. King.  
*Institutional Environments and Scholarly Work: American Criminology, 1951-1993*  
*Social Forces* 82/2004/4, pp. 1294f

## THIS ISSUE:

Message from the Chair... Page 1-2

SSSP Best Student Paper Award Winners.....Page 2

Theory Division Sessions at Annual Meetings.....Page 3-6

Announcements.....Page 7

## Message from the Chair

This is my last newsletter as your Division Chair, outlining the program for Montreal, announcing award winners and opportunities, and saying thanks. I combine my notes on the program with a couple of very brief remarks on the future of social problems theory.

First, we have a strong program for the Annual Meetings in Montreal. I hope that many of you can come to the Annual Meetings and to our sessions, listed below. It will be a rewarding experience. Several themes will be addressed. One relates "Collective Memory and Collective Representation" to this year's meeting theme "Fights over Justice, Diversity, and Democracy." We had enough outstanding submissions to put together a mini-symposium, with two subsequent sessions on Saturday afternoon. Indeed, the ways in which we conceive of justice, diversity, and democracy is contingent on the ways in which we remember our history and on our collective representation of ethnicity and nation in a globalizing context. My recent work has suggested, for example, that the United States is blessed with an institutionalized good conscience regarding its history and its role in the world (J. Savelsberg and R. King in the *American Journal of Sociology* 111/2005/2:579-616). Such conscience has positive and problematic effects on justice, diversity, and democracy—the ways in which they are carried out at home and communicated to the world.

Another panel, capably organized by Tim Kubal, links the meetings theme to social movement research. This is exactly one of the needed strategies of building bridges between what has commonly been considered social problems theory and closely related neighboring fields. Susan Warner organized a highly promising panel on teaching social problems theory in social problems courses. Many of these courses continue to be organized along the lines of specific types of recognized social problems, despite the inroads of constructivism in recent decades--and often at the expense of theory. We are all eager to learn about cures to this recognized problem.

Last but not least, Lara Foley set out to address an issue, discussed at last year's business meeting and sessions, by organizing a set of panels on ways to open up social problems theory to new perspectives. Many participants expressed concerns about stagnation in social problems theory, and its institutional and intellectual isolation from innovation in the social sciences. "Against Fossilized Social

Problems Theory: Opening the Door to New Directions in Sociological Theory" is a panel that begins to address these concerns. We all know that SSSP and social problems theory grew out of concern with too monolithic an American Sociological Society and a drive for innovation and engaged critique. Sociology has changed radically since the 1950s. Much dynamism in broader sociology and in the different sections of ASA could be observed in recent decades. How can social problems theory stay connected and engage in exchanges with those innovations? Intellectual and institutional issues are raised. Importantly, this is a plea against insularity. Highly relevant work, dealing with problems as distinct as collective trauma and crime, may not even contain the term social problems. It may certainly occur outside the boundaries of SSSP and our division (see quotes in far left column). Social problems theory can only stay alive and well if it engages in exchanges with work done in other specialty areas of social science research and theory formation, and with developments beyond the boundaries of the United States.

Back to the program, two further panels organized by Lara Foley are most timely as they address "Media, Rationalization, and New Limitations on Public Debate" and finally "Disaster, War and Framing Fear."

The Social Problems Theory Division Business Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 10 from 10:30am - 12:10pm (please check program for location). I very much hope you will be able to join us. We will be discussing future directions the Division may take and ideas for panels for the 2007 meetings. The 2005 Business Meeting turned into one of the more memorable substantive discussions at the meetings, inspiring many of the following panels. Let's move on in this direction.

Again, we look forward to seeing many of you at these sessions and the business meeting. We hope you agree that the sessions look promising. They certainly address important current day issues and open up avenues for future innovations in social problems theory and research. And, again, the business meeting should be much more exciting than the title suggests. Please join us.

Second, it is a pleasure to announce two outstanding student paper award winners. The first place winner is Edward Walker from Pennsylvania State University with "Polity Membership, Movement Cultures, and

*Iron Message from the Chair, continued:*

Laws: Three Types of Institutionalization in Social Movement Theory.” The second place winner is **Ray Maratea**, University of Delaware, with “The e-Rise and Fall of Social Problems: The Blogosphere as a Public Arena.” Congratulations, Edward and Ray! The winners were selected, from a highly competitive field, by our Award Committee (Tim Kubal [chair], Axel Groenemeyer, and Karen Lutfey). I thank the committee members for their volunteering and hard work.

The newsletter ends with several **announcements** you may be interested in, including notes on a special mentoring program at this year’s meetings, a call for contributions to an *Encyclopedia for Social Problems*, and an announcement of a new book by Darin Weinberg, our past chair, entitled *Of Others Inside: Insanity, Addiction, and Belonging in America*. The book was published in 2005 by Temple University Press.

As we prepare for the transition to a new division chair, I also want to thank all those who nominated candidates and those who were willing to run. We had a good election with most worthy candidates. Mitch Berbrier was the winner, and he accepted the election. Thank you, Mitch! We are much looking forward to your invigorating leadership.

Final ‘thank you’ notes go to all who contributed to the Division’s well-being over the past two years. This is a communal effort. Special thanks to **Michele Koontz** without whom little at SSSP and its divisions would work! And many thanks to **Mary Drew**, Administrative Aide in the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota, whom we have to thank for the nice layout of our newsletter over the past two years.

Thank you all for allowing me to serve as your chair during the past two years. It has been an honor, and I have learned from the experience.

Joachim J. Savelsberg, 2004-06 Chair  
SSSP Division on Social Problems Theory

## Social Problems Theory Best Student Paper Award

The committee, consisting of Professors Tim Kubal (chair), Axel Groenemeyer, and Karen Lutfey received a wealth of impressive submissions. Yet, a unanimous vote for a most outstanding paper, authored by Edward Walker, resulted in a clear and unambiguous decision. A paper by Ray Maratea from Delaware received the Second Place award. Congratulations, Edward and Ray! Information on both papers follows:

### First Place

**Edward Walker**, Department of Sociology, Pennsylvania State University: “Polity Membership, Movement Cultures, and Iron Laws: Three Types of Institutionalization in Social Movement Theory.”

**Abstract:** *Recent literatures have brought renewed attention to the concept of social movement institutionalization, and a growing group of scholars makes the case that Western democracies are increasingly “social movement societies” in which movement ideas and practices are so commonplace as to represent a routine element of political life. As civil societies and larger institutional systems increasingly interpenetrate, the concept of movement institutionalization becomes particularly significant in understanding the role of the public in democratic politics. In this essay I attempt to clarify the concept of institutionalization as it is employed in social movement analysis, building on insights both from social movement theory and neo-institutionalist analyses of organizations. I argue that in order to adequately specify the dynamics of movement institutionalization, the concept should be decomposed into three constituent elements: the political factors relating to the incorporation of movements into the state; factors regarding movement cultures, framing and tactical repertoires, and the cultural effects of movements more broadly; and factors relating to the presence of organizations in movements. Along with each of these frameworks, I identify a series of diffusion processes. Once these three key processes are identified, I consider their interconnections by exploring six ideal-typical scenarios in which one form of institutionalization promotes another, thereby demonstrating the importance of distinguishing between the variety of institutionalization processes faced by modern social movements.*

## Second Place

*Ray Maratea*, Department of Sociology, University of Delaware: “The e-Rise and Fall of Social Problems: The Blogosphere as a Public Arena.”

**Abstract:** *Social problems theory has yet to fully address the impact that new communication technologies are having on the claims-making process. This article examines emergence of the blogosphere as a cultural phenomenon that has provided outside claims-makers with a powerful new public arena to advance social problem claims. Using Hilgartner and Bosk’s (1988) public arenas model of social problem construction, blog-generated problem claims are examined to analyze how Internet driven social problems compete for public attention. Findings suggest that although blogs make the claims-making process more efficient, offer expanded carrying capacity compared to traditional arenas, and allow more outsider claims-makers the opportunity to have a voice in social problems construction; only a small number of blogs have become recognized as claims-making arenas, they still rely on traditional principles of selection, and face the same competition for mass media attention as claims constructed in traditional arenas.*

# SOCIAL PROBLEMS THEORY DIVISION SESSIONS IN MONTREAL

The **Social Problems Theory Division Business Meeting** is scheduled for Thursday, August 10 from 10:30am - 12:10pm (please check program for location). I much hope you will be able to join us. We will be discussion future directions the Division may take and ideas for panels for the 2007 meetings. The 2005 Business Meeting turned into one of the more memorable substantive discussion at the meetings, and many of the following panels were inspired by that discussion. Let’s move on in this direction. I hope to see many of you at the business meeting.

## I. Collective Memory and Representation 1: Fights over Justice, Diversity and Democracy

Saturday, August 12

12:30 pm - 2:10 pm

Room: St. Laurent

*Organizer & Facilitator:* Joachim J. Savelsberg, University of Minnesota

### *Papers*

“Survivor Movements and Collective Memory: Fighting for Social Change in the Wake of a Traumatic Past.”

Thomas DeGloma, Rutgers University

“Commemoration, Accumulation, Nationalism, and/or Social Justice? Cultural Memory and Contending Discourses about the WTC.” Bradley W. Wing, University of Missouri-Columbia

“Remembering the Dawsons: Crime, Memory, and Social Policy in Baltimore.”

Corey D. Fields, Northwestern University

“Who has the Power to Remember? Rescaling and Re-examining the Process of Public Memory.”

Deidre Ferron, University of Chicago

**II: Collective Memory and Representation 2:  
Technology, Media, Politics and Scholarship**

Saturday, August 12

2:30 pm – 4:10 pm

Room: St-Pierre

*Organizer and Facilitator:* Joachim J. Savelsberg, University of Minnesota

*Papers*

“U.S. War Crimes, the Media, and the 2004 Bush-Kerry Presidential Race.” Ken Cunningham, Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg

“Recovering Evicted Memories: Heritage and Identity through Technology and Contested Spaces.” Diana E. Leung, University of British Columbia

“Public Opinion and Income Inequality: Do the Facts of the Matter Make a Difference?” Martha Crum, Graduate Center and Queens College/City University of New York

“Theoretical Visions in Classical Theory: DuBois and Gilman.” Belinda Herrera, Arizona State University

**III. Social Problems Theory and Movement Theory:  
Studying Justice, Diversity and Democracy**

Thursday August 10

12:30 pm - 2:10 pm

Room: Fontaine A

*Organizer:* Tim Kubal

*Papers*

"Movement Building and Making History." Charlotte Ryan, University of Massachusetts, Lowell

"The Breast Cancer Movement: Social Movement Success and Cooptation." Sabrina McCormick, Michigan State University and Lori Baralt

"Conditions for Broad-Based Coalition Formation: The case of the civil human right front in Hong Kong." Ho Chun Kit, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

"More than a 'Grammatical Construction'? Same Sex Marriage and the Sexual Minority Movement in South Africa." Ashley Currier, University of Pittsburgh.

**IV. Teaching Theory in Social Problems Courses**

(please check program for time and room)

*Organizer, Chair and Discussant:* Susan Warner

*Papers*

“Teaching Social Problems Theory in a Feminist Classroom: Theory for Praxis.” Joanne Ardovini, Metropolitan College of New York

“Beyond Funny: Using Joke-Texts to Make Aspects of Alienation Real, Recognizable, and Categorically Distinct.” R. Kirk Mauldin, University of Wisconsin-Stout

“Theory as the Starting Point: Teaching about Peace.” Kathryn M. Feltey, University of Akron

“Using Service Learning to Teach Social Problems: The Question of Social Justice.” Katherine Rowell, Sinclair Community College

## **V. Against Fossilized Social Problems Theory: Opening the Door to New Directions in Sociological Theory**

Thursday, August 10

8:30 am - 10:10 am

(please check program for room)

*Organizer:* Lara Foley, University of Tulsa

*Discussant:* Christopher Faircloth, University of Florida

### *Papers*

“Social Problems Theory: Fossilized, Fractionalized or Fraternalized?” Michelle Corbin, University of Maryland College Park

“Unheard Voices and Turf Battles: How Academic Disciplines and Victims Talk About Selves.” Kathleen S. Lowney, Valdosta State University

“Navigating Consequential Improvements: Examining Unrecognized, Unintended and Emergent Outcomes of Attempts to Better Social and Environmental Relationships.” Alison Grace Cliath, Washington State University

“Third World Critiques of Western Feminist Theory in the Post-Development Era.” Javier Pereira Bruno, University of Texas at Austin

“Marxism's Influence on Contemporary Sociological Thought.” Charles Pinderhughes, Boston College

## **VI. Media, Rationalization, and New Limitations on Public Debate**

Thursday, August 10

4:30 pm - 6:30 pm

(please check program for room)

*Organizer:* Lara Foley, University of Tulsa

### *Papers*

“The Rise of Polemical Documentary Films as a Popular Form of Claimsmaking.” Brian A. Monahan and Joel Best, University of Delaware

“The McDonaldization of Competitive Debate.” Raj Ghoshal, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

“Conspiracy Theories and Social Problems.” David Simon, University of North Florida

“Social Theory and Social Problems with Social Justice in Mind.” Richard K. Caputo, Yeshiva University

## **VII. Disaster, War and Framing Fear**

Thursday, August 10

2:30 pm - 4:10 pm

(please check program for room)

*Organizer:* Lara Foley, University of Tulsa

### *Papers*

“Looting in the Media: A Comparison of Print News Media Reports During Hurricanes Frances, Ivan and Jeanne.” Lauren E. Barsky, Disaster Research Center, University of Delaware

“What Do Urban Crises Tell Us About Poverty.” Ira Silver, Framingham State College

“Theory of War Propaganda Technology: From WWII Radio to Video War Games.” Susan Cavin, New York University

“Towards a Sociology of Fear.” Frank Furedi, The University of Kent

**Other session of interest:**

Friday, August 11  
2:30 pm - 4:10 pm  
Room: Outremount

**Author Meets Critics, Mario Luis Small: *Villa Victoria: the Transformation of Social capital in a Boston Barrio*, Winner of the 2005 C. Wright Mills Award**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**SPEED MENTORING SESSION**

This year's SSSP annual meeting in Montreal will feature a "speed mentoring" session that will offer graduate students, untenured faculty, and applied sociologists ("mentees") the opportunity to sit one-on-one with a stellar group of senior faculty ("mentors") to get feedback on dissertations and/or research projects that are underway or still in the planning stages. These meetings will each last 20 minutes, and there will be time for four such meetings within the speed mentoring session time block of 100 minutes. Senior faculty mentors include Joel Best, Richard Caputo, Kimberly Cook, Elizabeth Ettore, Kathleen Ferraro, Gregory Hooks, Valerie Jenness, Nancy Jurik, Barbara Katz Rothman, Kathleen Lowney, Nancy Naples, Mary Romero, and Richard Wilsnack.

Complete details about the speed mentoring session and how to participate as a mentee will be included in the SSSP preliminary program and will also be posted in May on the SSSP web site. Although this session is primarily intended for graduate students, untenured faculty, and applied sociologists, tenured faculty are also welcome to indicate mentor preferences and will be accommodated as space permits.

For further information, please contact the speed mentoring session organizer, Steve Barkan (barkan@maine.edu>barkan@maine.edu).

**SEEKING CONTRIBUTIONS TO AN *Encyclopedia of Social Problems***

Sage Publications has announced that it will publish in 2007 a two-Volume, multidisciplinary Encyclopedia of Social Problems, a premier reference tool for students, scholars, and professionals with a wide variety of specialties. General Editor Vincent N. Parrillo invites author contributors for the 700 entries of varying lengths (500, 1,000, 1,500, or 2,500 words). If you are interested in writing an entry (with a byline), send an e-mail to parrillov@wpunj.edu, giving your name, affiliation, address, phone number, c.v., and a short list of subject areas of greatest interest to you.

**NEW BOOK BY OUR PREVIOUS DIVISION CHAIR--LEARN FROM HIS WORK:**

**DARIN WEINBERG** has a new book out, entitled *Of Others Inside: Insanity, Addiction, and Belonging in America* (2005). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Blurb: There is little doubt among scientists and the general public that homelessness, mental illness, and addiction are inter-related. In *Of Others Inside*, Darin Weinberg examines how these inter-relations have taken form in the United States. He links the establishment of these connections to the movement of mental health and addiction treatment from redemptive processes to punitive ones and back again, and explores the connection between social welfare, rehabilitation, and the criminal justice system. Seeking to offer a new sociological understanding of the relationship between social exclusion and mental disability, *Of Others Inside* considers the general social conditions of homelessness, poverty, and social marginality in the U.S. Weinberg also explores questions about American perceptions of these conditions, and examines in great detail the social reality of mental disability and drug addiction without reducing people's suffering to simple notions of biological fate or social disorder.

**Reviews**

"Well written and unique in its empirical scope, *Of Others Inside* is a groundbreaking analysis of the relationship between social exclusion and mental disorder in America.... [A] major contribution to debates about the relationship between community solidarity and mental health." -Jaber F. Gubrium, University of Missouri

"Based on scrupulously careful historical analysis and penetrating ethnography, Weinberg liberates us from the idea that insanity and addiction are either human constructions or independent realities. He illuminates how they are equally social products and causal factors in shaping expected paths toward wellness. Although focused on the marginalized ill, this work provides a more general model for getting beyond radically objectivist or subjectivist explanations that stifle progress in the human sciences. This will be the book's most enduring contribution." -David A. Karp, author of *Speaking of Sadness: Depression, Disconnection, and the Meanings of Illness and The Burden of Sympathy: How Families Cope with Mental Illness*

"*Of Others Inside* is brilliant and fascinating. The author has done a commendable job charting a middle ground between the equally unsatisfying positions that mental illness and addictions are things-in-themselves or arbitrary social constructions." -Spencer Cahill, University of South Florida

**Contents**

Foreword - Bryan S. Turner Acknowledgments 1. Introduction: Beyond Objectivism and Subjectivism in the Sociology of Mental Health  
Part I. A History of Insanities and Addictions among Marginalized Americans  
    2. Setting the Stage  
    3. Addictions and Insanities: Two Fields and Their Phenomena  
Part II. A Tale of Two Programs  
    4. Canyon House  
    5. Twilights  
    6. Conclusion  
References  
Index

**CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR NEWSLETTER**

As before, I invite comments and information from the membership. 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.  
J.J.S.