SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE CLASSROOM
Guest Editors: Sarah E. Rusche, Kris Macomber and Maxine P. Atkinson

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Scope and Mission: *Teaching Sociology* publishes articles, notes, applications, and reviews intended to be helpful to the discipline's teachers. Articles range from experimental studies of teaching and learning to broad, synthetic essays on pedagogically important issues. The general intent is to share theoretically stimulating and practically useful information and advice with teachers. Formats include full-length articles, notes of 15 pages or less, interviews, review essays, classroom applications of current research, conversations, and film, video, and software reviews.

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TEACHING SOCIOLOGY

GUIDELINES FOR PAPERS SUBMITTED TO *TEACHING SOCIOLOGY*

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GUIDELINES FOR PAPERS SUBMITTED TO *TEACHING SOCIOLOGY*

Teaching Sociology publishes several types of papers. The basic distinction is between articles and notes. Generally, articles are longer than notes, more analytical, contain an extensive literature review and data analysis. Notes are shorter (usually 15 pages or less), contain a shorter literature review, and present and assess a teaching technique. The distinction reflects the dual purposes of the journal: 1) to provide a forum for analyzing the teaching of sociology, and 2) as a forum for the exchange of specific teaching ideas.

Articles are evaluated using some combination of the following criteria:
1. How useful and original are the ideas presented?
2. How thoroughly does the author consider implications for the teaching of sociology?
3. How well developed is the basic analytical point?
4. Is there sociological theory and/or analysis?
5. How thoroughly and accurately does the author ground the paper in the literature?
   - Are there articles in *Teaching Sociology* that the author should cite?
   - Does the paper tie into the larger literature on pedagogy?
6. How extensively does the author extend previous ideas and bring some intellectual closure to the topic?
7. In an empirical study, how sound is the methodology and how accurately do the presented results reflect the data? If applicable, how is student success measured and is there evidence that demonstrates that learning outcomes were achieved?
8. How well written is the paper?
   - How well integrated is the paper?
   - How well organized is the paper?

Notes are evaluated using some combination of the following criteria:
1. How useful, original, and transferable is the technique, strategy, or idea?
   - Does the paper discuss the types of classes and institutions where the technique can be used?
2. How cogently are the ideas and implications presented?
3. Is the description sufficiently detailed so a reader could easily employ it?
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5. Is there a brief literature review?
6. Does the author address potential difficulties with the technique and suggest possible solutions?
7. Is qualitative or quantitative outcome data reported?
8. How well written is the paper?
   - How well integrated is the paper?
   - How well organized is the paper?

GUIDELINES FOR PAPERS SUBMITTED TO *TEACHING SOCIOLOGY* FOR THE CONVERSATION SECTION

Teaching Sociology publishes brief comments, arguments, conversations, interviews, and responses related to a wide variety of issues in teaching sociology. The purpose of the Conversation section is to stimulate lively, thoughtful, topical, and controversial discussion. The Conversation section serves as a forum for an on-going exchange of ideas, arguments, responses, and commentary on issues that present the teacher of sociology with formidable challenges, dilemmas, and problems. Submissions to the Conversation section are refereed.

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1. How useful and original are the author's ideas, arguments, and/or commentary?
2. How relevant are the author's ideas, arguments, and/or commentary to issues in teaching sociology?
3. How well do the author's ideas and arguments contribute to an on-going dialogue on issues and dilemmas related to teaching sociology?
4. How thoroughly does the author consider implications for the teaching of sociology?
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   - How well integrated is the paper?
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Teaching Sociology occasionally publishes applications of current research. The purpose of application papers is to make sociological research more accessible to undergraduate students by providing instructors with pedagogical tools for incorporating current research in their undergraduate courses. Application papers present learning activities, discussion questions, and other student-centered learning techniques that can be used in a variety of undergraduate courses. Applications are solicited by the editor.

Revised: August 22, 2007

COMMENT FROM THE EDITOR

THIS ISSUE is partially devoted to the "sociology of the classroom." I am indebted to Maxine Atkinson and her colleagues for articulating this construct and proposing that a special issue be devoted to it. I have long shared their concern that much sociological scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is lacking theoretical depth and richness. The articles that appear here provide not only insight into the classroom as a social world but also a model for how sociological theory enhances SoTL. The issue is rounded out by three teaching notes—those by Obach, Mallinson, and Levine-Rasky—that contribute to our pedagogical toolkit.

As of July 1, 2009, all new manuscripts should be sent to editor-elect Kathleen Lowney at:

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I will continue to receive revise and re-submits until August 8, 2009, after which time these also should be sent to the incoming editor.

Liz Grauerholz
Editor

DENYING SOCIAL HARM: STUDENTS' RESISTANCE TO LESSONS ABOUT INEQUALITY*

Students share folk beliefs that make it difficult for them to understand inequality, especially the harmful consequences of social practices they routinely engage in, are attached to, and take for granted. Four of these beliefs include: (a) harm is direct, extreme, and the product of an individual's intentions; (2) harm is the product of the psyche; (3) for harm to occur, there must be an individual to blame; (4) beliefs and practices that students cherish or enjoy cannot be harmful. We offer sociological ideas that counter students' individualistic understanding of social harm.

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Chapel Hill

MARTHA COPP
East Tennessee State University

STUDENTS ENTER OUR CLASSES with non-sociological ideas about the nature and causes of social harm. Their folk beliefs locate the cause of harm in the individual, thereby obscuring the social harms that result from systemic inequality.[1] In our experience, these folk beliefs are most pronounced among students who benefit from multiple forms of privilege (whites, heterosexuals, males, middle/upper-middle class people). We have also encountered students in disadvantaged categories who deny social harm. Female students, in particular, find it difficult to think of themselves as belonging to a sex class and to see the harms they experience as a consequence of being women. Regardless of social position, most students resist acknowledging the harms brought about by unequal social arrangements. A sociological view of harm threatens them because it suggests how students might be implicated in reproducing it.

We will outline and analyze four folk beliefs that make it difficult for students to think sociologically about the harms caused by inequality: (1) harm is direct, extreme, and the product of an individual's intentions; (2) harm is the product of the psyche; (3) for harm to occur, there must be an individual to blame; (4) beliefs and practices that students cherish or enjoy cannot be harmful. This list is not exhaustive; some students embrace other folk beliefs about inequality, and a few enter our classes with quasi-sociological understandings of privilege and oppression. But, in our combined 45 years of teaching, we have been impressed by the strong similarities, rather than the differences, in students' assumptions.[2]

[1]"Folk beliefs" refer to conventional understandings that people use to make sense of the world and to act toward it (Becker 1970; see Turner 1957).

[2]Sherryl Kleinman has taught courses in gender, social psychology, fieldwork, and inequality for 29 years at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, a research-oriented state university that enrolls about 28,000 students. Of the approximately 17,000 undergraduates, most are white and middle- or upper-middle class. Martha Copp has taught courses in social problems, gender, social psychology, and fieldwork for 16 years at East Tennessee State University,

As sociologists who teach about inequality, we want students to analyze the systematic and indirect harms that result from hidden economic inequality and from unconscious sexism, racism, and heterosexism. We also want them to identify who is harmed, how, and who benefits. We try to shift students away from an individualistic perspective so they can see the harmful consequences of social practices they take for granted. Folk beliefs that characterize inequality and harm as individual-level phenomena stand in the way of that goal. By analyzing students' folk beliefs, we can anticipate resistance to sociological lessons about inequality and find better ways to teach.

FOLK BELIEF #1: HARM IS DIRECT, EXTREME, AND THE PRODUCT OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S INTENTIONS

Students conceive of harm as an action that has immediate negative consequences, performed by an individual who *intends* to harm another person or persons. If we ask students to supply examples of harms related to sexism, female and male students envision a male boss who expects "sexual favors" from a female employee. For racism, white students (and some students of color) think of a white person (usually a white man) who hurls racial epithets at a person of color (usually a black man). For heterosexism (a system of heterosexual advantage), heterosexual (and some queer) students think only of an individual's degree of homophobia, and refer to the men who killed Matthew Shepard.

Central to their understanding of harm as intentional and extreme is students' belief that they are good people who can distinguish harmful from unharmful behaviors and who would never knowingly harm others. They accept that they might unintentionally offend an individual who is a member of a subordinate group by invoking a negative stereotype about that group. They feel bad about unwittingly hurting someone's feelings and may try to "fix" their "offensive remark" with an apology. It is more difficult to get their minds around the idea that their remark can unintentionally and indirectly harm *all* members of the subordinate group, even when it is made only to members of their privileged group in the name of camaraderie.

From students' perspective, harm lacks ambiguity—any reasonable person would recognize which practices are harmful and which are not. Students, especially if they are privileged, also think of harm as infrequent norm-breaking behaviors. But social harms are often indirect and routine, remaining invisible to the sociologically untrained eye and ear. And, if social harms are widespread, as so many are, students often fail to notice them because their ubiquity gives them a benign appearance, even at times to those in the disadvantaged category.

For example, what immediate harm can one detect when men and women use male-based generics such as "you guys" and "freshman" (see Kleinman 2002)? Or when someone scans the sexualized images on the covers of "women's magazines" while waiting to check out at the supermarket? The sexist terms reinforce the idea that men are the standard and that women can be erased, largely without protest, umpteen times a day, in conversations among friends, in workplaces, and in the mass media. The images in magazines reduce women's value to sexual objects, and, for the most part, even this "value" is relegated to young, white, upper-middle-class, heterosexualized women of particular body proportions and facial features.

In both examples, the participating individual lacks bad intentions, but the consequences—the social harms—are nonetheless operating. In the case of sexist advertising, there is more than the individual consumer involved; the images support the elites

whose industries profit from selling sexualized images of women. There is no one person to pinpoint, no immediate harm to observe. And without an individual producing an immediate harm, no bad intention can be identified. Without these familiar and reassuring targets, students are set adrift. Part of what we examine in our courses are the consequences of social acts and the links between them. For example, erasing women systematically in male generics—terms that are supposedly inclusive—dehumanizes women as a group. At the same time, the systematic highlighting of women as sexual objects in language and images reduces their humanity. These phenomena occur often and out of our awareness, each one strengthening the effect of the other.

FOLK BELIEF #2: HARM IS THE PRODUCT OF THE PSYCHE

The idea that harm originates in an individual's intentions implies that a person chooses to do harm and thus is capable of making better choices. Yet many of our students also believe in a kind of psychological determinism. Instead of thinking of *systems* of oppression and privilege that connect members of dominant and oppressed groups, they think about racist, sexist, or homophobic *individuals*. And these individuals have "psychological problems" that compel them to act in harmful ways. By comparison, sociology seems superficial, failing to dig deeply into the psyche of the racist, sexist, or homophobe in order to prevent or cure their personal troubles. Some students believe that a psychological explanation is more sophisticated because it gets beneath the generalities offered by sociology. Occasionally, students invoke the social by saying that bad parenting explains why someone acts badly, but they define bad parents as psychologically flawed individuals who "messed up" their children.

What kinds of generalities do we offer them? Students learn that 98 percent of rapes—whether perpetrated against men or women—are committed by men, and that most of the women raped by men know the perpetrator(s). Yet students may still say about rape, especially date rape, that "every case is different" (see Schwalbe 2008b:124-141). Sociologically, what purpose does their folk belief serve? Students' individualistic etiology allows male (heterosexual) students—the privileged group vis-à-vis sexism—to see themselves, and their male heterosexual friends, as the "good guys" who would never coerce women into sex. Coercive sex conjures the image of the stranger, typically imagined as a black man, jumping out of the bushes, using a knife or gun to threaten a woman, and then raping her. With that defining image in mind, any routinely manipulative practices on the part of male students toward potential or current female sexual partners become excluded from the category of coercion. For example, some of our female students tell us later in the course that their boyfriends pressure them to use pornographic films while they are having sex, or expect them to look like the women in the films. Yet only within a sociological framework can students begin to critically analyze the pressures on women in "consensual" sex.[3]

The essentializing image of The Rapist makes it unnecessary for heterosexual male students to analyze how some of their practices—telling sexist jokes, bonding with other men by making comments about women's bodies, consuming heterosexual pornography—reinforce a rape culture.[4] For example, in the case of "soft" porn films,

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[3]Most of the white women we teach think of black men as potential rapists, associating them with stranger rape. Only when they consider date rape with white men do white women say "each rape is different." They construct a psychological type for a few bad white men, but for black men, they apply the racist stereotype that black men are "naturally" sexual predators (see Collins 2004).

[4]"Rape culture is a set of values and beliefs that provides an environment conducive to rape" (Boswell and Spade 1996:133).

women appear as always available for and desiring of sex with men, even in contexts conventionally defined as non-sexual. Men's use of heterosexual porn, then, becomes an "enabling condition" (Schwalbe 2008b:147-148) for sexual harassment and sexual assault. It does not cause rape but, in an indirect way, makes it easier for men to sexualize women in all areas of life and harder for men to see women as human beings first. As Michael Schwalbe put it, in pornography "a woman's thoughts and feelings . . . are less important than the shape of her breasts or her interest in having sex with men" (Schwalbe 2008b:147). If members of a social category are perceived as objects whose feelings do not deserve respect, then it becomes easier for others to harm them.

It is not surprising that heterosexual men, as members of the dominant group, deny the indirect harms of their sexist practices. But we have also found that most women psychologize men who rape and are reluctant to think of the sexist practices we listed above as enabling conditions for men's sexual violence against women. How can we explain this sociologically? Heterosexual women's beliefs generate a false sense of security. When a woman in our classes hears that a man raped a female student, she can tell herself that she would never walk alone at night or date/be in a relationship with "the wrong kind of man." Although students believe that The Rapist is a psychological type, women's psychologizing shifts responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim, attributing blame to the *woman*. Female students say, "What was she doing there?" Or, "She shouldn't have been drinking." Or, "What was she doing with *him*? I just don't understand her." Whether they think about perpetrators or victims, female students assume the individuals involved have psychological problems, or made bad decisions because of a messed-up psyche.

Women normalize what it means to live in a rape-prone society; they curtail their daily movements and live in fear, but fail to connect these restrictions to sexism. Both female and male students thus let the privileged group off the hook; prevention and cure reside in teaching women self-defense and how to psychologically assess which "few" men are dangerous.

Understandably, heterosexual women feel threatened by the sociological analysis of men's violence against women and the critique of masculinity at the core of it. To think sociologically about men's mistreatment of women could lead them to challenge men's behaviors. Female students are quite aware of men's sexist practices, though they do not use that term to describe them. Women also know that calling men on their sexist practices will make them unpopular. Being "one of the guys" depends on their acceptance of, and participation in, men's sexist remarks and jokes. It is more comfortable for female students, particularly those invested in heterosexual romance and marriage, to think of the vast majority of men as those who would never harm women, and to think of common sexist practices as trivial or "just jokes." By imagining themselves as savvy, female students believe that they can avoid the few "bad apples" in the pool of potential intimate partners.

With the exception of sexism (for reasons we analyze throughout this article), students who experience other forms of oppression are more likely to pay attention to the systematic privileges that the dominant group receives and thus are less likely to turn to psychological explanations. Black students have fewer blinders about the pervasiveness of racial oppression, and queer students understand that hate crimes are not isolated events.

Students who are members of the dominant group (whites, heterosexuals), however, treat racism and heterosexism as psychologically-rooted problems. For example, much like heterosexual male students who think of themselves as "good guys," many white students think of themselves as racially egalitarian and non-homophobic. White students think other people are "the

racists"—those whose prejudice leads them to make racist remarks and act violently against people of color. They do not see their own racist jokes, told in racially segregated social settings, as enabling conditions that reinforce the perception of all non-whites as inferior. Nor do they see how other racially homogeneous social arrangements—networks, student organizations, extracurricular activities, and internships—preserve benefits for white people. Their earnest belief that racism is a psychological problem leads them to suggest prejudice-reduction workshops as a solution to racism. Similarly, heterosexual students who routinely use "That's so gay" as a generic term for anything negative, are surprised to discover that they, who are non-homophobic, reinforce heterosexism through that expression.

FOLK BELIEF #3: FOR HARM TO OCCUR, THERE MUST BE AN INDIVIDUAL TO BLAME

If harm is direct, extreme, and intentional, then there must be someone to blame for it. When acts of harm are acute and overt, students blame the individuals who perpetrate these harms (e.g., serial killers, rioters, thieves, bullies, sadists). As we discussed in the previous sections, students are inclined to explain people's harmful practices as the result of bad intentions or psychopathology. But, in the case of chronic and entrenched social inequalities, students have trouble grasping that these systematic inequalities are reproduced in routine interactions among "normal" people who participate in unequal social arrangements. These practices cumulatively privilege members of dominant groups while cumulatively oppressing members of subordinate groups. As Peggy McIntosh (2007) observed, "As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage" (p. 178).

Before students learn about privilege and its cumulative advantages, they explain long-term inequalities by invoking "personal responsibility"—a belief, central to U.S. individualism, that people create their own fate. Entrenched inequalities occur, students claim, because some individuals choose to take greater control of their lives than others. Those individuals succeed in life because they work hard, look out for themselves, and do not expect other people, including taxpayers, to take care of them. If all people would show some backbone, take responsibility for their actions, work harder, and resist the impulse to blame their problems on someone else, then our society would run better, and inequality would be nipped in the bud.

Students claim that they are looking at people as individuals, but their interpretations of blame are framed by their assumptions about which categories of people are morally worthy and which are not. For most students, morally-worthy people are found among privileged groups: men, white people, middle- and upper-class people, heterosexuals, homeowners, etc. Most of our students value and identify with these groups. Students reason that when morally-worthy categories of people mind their own business and lead their normal, law-abiding lives, they cannot possibly contribute to or benefit from inequality that penalizes others. Consequently, when we introduce the idea that members of dominant groups derive systematic benefit at the expense of members of subordinate groups—men benefiting at women's expense, whites benefiting at the expense of people of color, financially comfortable people benefiting from the poor—students think we are attacking individuals who have done nothing wrong. They also initially think that sociologists merely switch blame from one group of individuals (e.g., the poor) to another (the wealthy); their perception comes from the unsociological assumption that problems are caused by the direct action of bad or unthinking individuals rather than through "rigged" social arrangements (Schwalbe 2008a).

For example, when students review the finding that men have higher average earnings than women at similar levels of education, they first hold women responsible for their lower earnings. Students suggest that women earn less than men on average because they "naturally" do not want to compete for higher pay and promotions and because they choose to "opt out" of the workplace to have children. Until we examine the beliefs and practices that systematically benefit men at women's expense, students consider any mention of men's unearned advantages as blaming men—"male bashing." Understandably, they do not know about occupational sex segregation, sexist beliefs and practices of men (and some women) in positions of authority who deny women better jobs and higher pay, men's greater access to positions with job ladders, or how the "glass ceiling" limits women in non-traditional jobs while the "glass escalator" promotes men in characteristically "female" jobs (see Padavic and Reskin 2002; Reskin 2004; Williams 1992).

Lacking media literacy, students do not know the extent to which news outlets recycle stories about the opt-out myth (Graff 2007; Kuperberg and Stone 2008; Williams, Manvell, and Bronstein 2006). Once students examine the social arrangements that contribute to women's lower average earnings, such as the "motherhood penalty" in getting hired (Correll, Benard and Paik 2007), they also see how the second shift and the unrealistic expectations we commonly attach to motherhood (Hays 1996) unfairly burden women at home and at work—and simultaneously reward men.

In the case of other chronic social harms, students try to isolate a socially unworthy—and thus blameworthy—group from its surrounding social context. For example, in discussing homelessness, students rarely sympathize with homeless men, whom they consider to be alcoholic bums and panhandlers. Homeless women are pathologized as "crazy bag ladies," and students do not know what to say about homeless families (most often women escaping with their children from an abusive male partner). Nevertheless, students' initial reactions echo Ronald Reagan's infamous claim that homeless people choose to live on the streets. They treat homelessness, and poverty more generally, as an individual's failure to practice personal responsibility.

Students are startled by the idea that a variety of supposedly well-meaning people jointly produce—and profit from—the growth in unaffordable housing, the shrinking supply of low-cost housing, a reduced tax burden, and chronic under- and unemployment. The idea that capitalism as a system can be implicated in homelessness is threatening; after all, students want to benefit from it by maintaining or increasing their class privilege. It is easier to individualize blame than to delve into social arrangements that privilege us at the expense of others. So, the problem becomes homeless people, not homelessness.

Students try to pinpoint blame as they draw parallels between privileged and oppressed groups. False parallels are "statements that draw erroneous analogies between the experiences (and resources, privileges, and power) of the oppressed group and the advantaged group" (Kleinman 2007:31; see also Johnson 2005; Schwalbe 2008b). Students introduce false parallels about sex and race on a regular basis. In both cases, they suggest that both privileged and oppressed groups are either equally harmed by the inequality at hand (and thus equally to blame), or they are equally advantaged in some way (so that no social harm has occurred). Both of these claims "render the history of oppression invisible and erase current inequalities" between the privileged group and the oppressed group (Kleinman 2007:32).

For example, students who are troubled to hear that even anti-racist white people benefit at the expense of people of color, particularly black people, will claim that black people can be "just as racist" as white people. Or they argue that affirmative action programs give black people special privileges at the expense of "qualified whites."

Students who invoke false race parallels are not denying that discrimination against black people occurs. They claim instead that racism against blacks and racism against whites cancel each other out. Students deny that racism in the past is connected to whites' advantages in the present and, without social change, will keep on going.

Ultimately, false parallels deny that oppression exists by equating the position of each group in the society—as if there were an abstract society that equally oppresses everyone. This view denies that oppression occurs between two groups and is a "system of social inequality through which one group is positioned to dominate and benefit from the exploitation and subordination of another" (Johnson 2005:24).

There are good sociological reasons why white students cling to an ahistorical view of oppression, ignoring how white privilege and racial oppression are linked. If they were to accept the connection between past and present inequalities, then they would recognize all the benefits they have received, and continue to receive, from a racist system. By challenging the belief that they have earned every advantage in life, their self-worth is put into question. As we mentioned earlier, students perceive themselves as good people, which, for white students, means that they have nothing to do with racism. Can they still have a positive self-image if they understand racism as a system that collectively benefits the group they belong to?

Some members of oppressed groups have also internalized the belief that people in the oppressed category are to blame for their disadvantaged position. Occasionally, upper-middle-class black students dissociate themselves from black people—as a disadvantaged group—and speak of black people who "play the race card." Echoing such spokespeople as Bill Cosby, Clarence Thomas, and Shelby Steele, the students blame black people for their economic troubles. They claim that poverty among black people could end if black fathers would only "step up" and provide moral and financial support

for their children. And they scold poor black mothers for being on welfare. Such comments, like those made by white people who share the same rhetoric, imply that disadvantages faced by blacks in the United States can be blamed on those who have failed to take responsibility for their lives.

FOLK BELIEF #4: BELIEFS AND PRACTICES THAT STUDENTS CHERISH OR ENJOY CANNOT BE HARMFUL

It is difficult for students, even those in disadvantaged categories, to acknowledge the oppressive consequences of the practices, desires, and opinions they are invested in. They interpret good feelings—pleasure, amusement, solidarity, normalcy—as proof of the absence of harm. Because students see themselves as good people who would never intentionally harm others or themselves, they treat their cherished practices, beliefs, and feelings as unchallengeable elements of their "true self," lying outside sociological analysis.

The strength of this folk concept is illustrated best by women's responses (especially heterosexual women) when we teach about gender inequality. As we wrote elsewhere (Kleinman, Copp, and Sandstrom 2006), "sexism is a form of oppression that is normalized and rendered invisible in a way that racism [for example] is not" (p. 131). We have already discussed students' belief that a practice can be harmful only if it is immediate and extreme. When it comes to women wearing make-up and revealing clothing, men opening doors for women, men driving women, and men initiating and paying for dates, female students experience these practices as benign or, more often, positive. If a practice feels good—to women—then it must be good. Men are particularly pleased to hear that women, the purported victims of sexism, find pleasure in the very practices feminist sociologists critique.

How can we speak of harm when, on the face of it, women appear to benefit from

these practices? As Marilyn Frye (1983) argues, door-opening and similar "nice" practices on the part of men toward women reinforce the idea that women are weak and in need of help, especially for tasks they can easily accomplish themselves; these acts of "'help' occur in counterpoint to a pattern of men not being helpful in many practical ways in which women might welcome help" (p. 6). Such practices reinforce sexism while masking, deflecting from, or offering meager compensation for larger gender inequalities: the wage gap, lack of reproductive rights, the second shift of housework performed by women in heterosexual households, and men's violence against women (Kleinman, Copp, and Sandstrom 2006).

Most of our female students do not initially see themselves as sharing a "common (but not homogeneous)" oppressive circumstance as women (Frye 1992:70). Rather, many of them see each other as competitors—for men. The "false power" women enjoy makes it hard for them to see gender inequality (see Kleinman, Copp, and Sandstrom 2006:136-138). Without a recognition of shared social harm, members of an oppressed category have no motivation to reduce it. Hence, the practices they enjoy also prevent the conditions that could make organized resistance to sexism possible, indirectly producing further harm.

In addition, it seems illogical to students that members of an oppressed category would harm themselves, even indirectly. Women's resistance to seeing the larger indirect harms of the practices they value can be explained sociologically. As bell hooks (1989) has argued, sexism is the only form of oppression in which the oppressed are meant to love their oppressors. Particularly among heterosexual women, refusing the false benefits of door-opening and "ladies' night" or failing to dress and act in ways that please men would make them less attractive. In a society in which women's worth is still equated with sexual appeal (to men) and having a boyfriend/male partner, analyzing the potential harm of such prac-

tices to women as a group is threatening to the female student's self-concept. For the most part, women in the presence or absence of a male partner feel better about themselves when they emulate conventional beauty standards (Bartky 1990).

What about the cherished beliefs and practices of members of the privileged group? Most of our male students recall using "fag," "gay," and similar epithets as a way to earn status and respect among other boys and to ward off any signs of femininity (see Pascoe 2007). Some of our male students recognize that aiming heterosexist insults at gays and lesbians is oppressive (causing direct harm), but they see no harm when they apply these terms to presumed heterosexual boys and men. Many male college students still find this language entertaining: the "joking" insults and pranks that tag another male as a "fag" fosters male solidarity and camaraderie. Sociologically, their practices are manhood acts[5] that maintain male supremacy—the underlying insult of "fag" is that a boy or man is acting in a way that could be construed as "feminine." Homophobic comments, then, become "a weapon of sexism" (Pharr 2007; see also Kimmel 2009).

When we work with students to analyze the social consequences of sexist and racist language, white students in our classes—particularly white male consumers of hip-hop—bring up a practice that appears, in their eyes, to be a double standard. They consider it racist for a white person to use the "n-word" when a black person is present (they initially have trouble recognizing indirect harmful consequences when it is used among whites), but they wonder whether it is harmful for black male hip-hop artists to use it. Some black male students, though rarely black women, defend the practice as a linguistic badge of honor, an emblem of solidarity among black men who struggle with class and race oppression.

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[5]Manhood acts are the ways that males behave to "signify a deference-eliciting masculine self" (Schwalbe 2005:77).

Others argue, as some hip-hop artists and cultural critics do, that using the term always promotes racism against black people. For those who sanction the "n-word" as a "stylistic" practice, claiming it has nothing to do with white supremacy and the past enslavement of Africans, the indirect consequences for black people as a group become invisible. Also, black men's use of the "n-word" inadvertently sends a message to white men, giving them license to use it and to deny white supremacy: how bad can the word be—and how bad can racism be—if black people use the term? Similarly, when female students of all races use "ho," "slut," and "bitch" as they greet each other on campus, men learn that the terms cannot be that harmful (Kleinman, Ezzell, and Frost 2009).

Earlier we discussed students' tendency to psychologize social harm, and to see sociology as under-analyzing what is going on. Yet, when we examine practices that they enjoy, or traditions they hold dear, some students accuse us of *over*-analyzing everyday life. Both reactions indicate students' blocks to sociological analysis. The students' claim that a practice is benignly habitual, trivial, or pleasurable—and thus not harmful—allows them to uphold their belief in themselves as good people who know harm when they see it and who would not reproduce it.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

In the United States, students inhabit a "deeply individualized society" (Pemberton 2007:28); their individualistic beliefs make it possible for them to deny the existence of inequalities and how those inequalities benefit or harm them. These beliefs also make it possible for students in privileged categories to retain their privileges without jeopardizing the image of themselves as good people. Students in disadvantaged categories can also deny how their practices, including those they find pleasurable, reinforce the unequal system that ultimately harms them.

Because these folk beliefs surface semester after semester, teachers can anticipate students' responses, especially their reluctance to examine how their practices support the status quo.[6] To counter students' individualistic understandings of harm, we organize our teaching to address the following sociological ideas and arguments:

- shift students' focus away from "good people" vs. "bad people" to the unintended consequences of specific social practices for reproducing or challenging inequality
- encourage students to think about the shared social position of groups or categories of people (e.g., "women as a group") rather than individuals (e.g., "this one woman I know")
- understand social practices in terms of who is harmed and how, and who benefits and how, even when those practices make people feel connected to each other
- emphasize the relationship between privilege and oppression; identify how unearned advantages accumulate for members of privileged groups, just as disadvantages accumulate for members of oppressed groups
- analyze examples of false power—social arrangements or practices that make members of oppressed groups *feel* powerful or otherwise in control, but do not offer real power or control
- connect harmful social practices by examining how they reinforce each other, and inequality as a whole
- point out the common rationales people offer for assigning or denying blame for inequality
- analyze common false parallels—the conventional idea that dominant and oppressed groups are harmed equally, or benefit equally, from unequal social arrangements.

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[6]Elsewhere we provide detailed examples of strategies for teaching about inequality (primarily sexism) and a sociological analysis of why they work (see Copp and Kleinman 2008; Kleinman, Copp, and Sandstrom 2006).

These ideas do more than guide our courses on inequality: they offer students ways to practice sociological awareness in their everyday lives.

Students come into our classes believing that what they think, feel, and do reflects their individuality. By the end of the course, the vast majority of them redefine their beliefs, desires, and practices as the products of unequal social arrangements and a faulty socialization that masked those very inequalities. Before the course began, students assumed they were making independent judgments; looking back, they see themselves as having unconsciously followed the "path of least resistance," reinforcing inequality along the way (see Johnson 2005:32).

By learning that human beings are interdependent, and that their practices have consequences for others, students become conscious actors. It is ironic, perhaps, that their self-confidence and sense of themselves as individuals grow over the semester, but their individuality is now based on sociological awareness. Equipped with a sociological tool-kit, they know they have real choices to make on a daily basis: Will they use their knowledge to challenge inequality, or continue to reproduce it? Because our students remain attached to a conception of themselves as good people, many choose the former. As students have often said to us, "This course made me into a better person." They share a sociologically-informed agency, one we hope they can sustain in the face of people, organizations, and a mass media that continue to cover up social harm.

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