Teaching/Learning Matters

ASA's Newsletter for the

Section On Teaching & Learning In Sociology

Volume 39, Number 3 ***Spring 2011***

Editors' Introduction

We are delighted to share with you the contents of this spring issue of *Teaching/Learning Matters*. As part of our ongoing commitment to provide examples of how teaching that connects the classroom to the community can strengthen both the reputation of our discipline and the learning experiences of our students, we bring you Leslie Hossfeld's "Connecting the Classroom to the Community."

Next, you can pull up a front row seat to an exciting debate about how best to teach statistics to sociology students. Salvatore Babones' article "Time for a New Curriculum for Social Statistics?" in our fall issue brought forth a "negative answer" from Michael DeCesare and an accompanying rejoinder from Babones. We are sure you will appreciate this thought-provoking and very informative discussion!

As always, we provide you with news about upcoming STLS teaching conferences, scholarships, and new books. Please keep sending this information to us for future issues!

This issue also includes an extremely useful article, "Using Videos in the Classroom: Pedagogy and The Sociological Cinema," that is just packed with wonderful resources and great ideas about how to enliven the classroom and strengthen teaching through the use of videos. We also have a description of a great new book on this very topic—*Cinematic Sociology*—that "helps students "see" films sociologically and develop critical thinking and analytical skills" with information on how you can order a review copy.

Finally, we have a moving and extremely constructive and valuable article on "Sustaining Commitment to Teaching in a Cynical World," by Keith Roberts. We have no doubt that, after reading it, you will feel more positive and even more committed to engaging your students in sociological inquiry.

If you would like to contribute to a future newsletter or comment on this one, please let us know! You can reach Jonathan White at jonathan.white@bridgew.edu, Corey Dolgon at cdologon@stonehill.edu, and Kathleen Korgen at korgenk@wpunj.edu. We look forward to hearing from you.

We thank, as always, our section chair, Darlaine Gardetto, Publications Committee Chair, Kerry Strand, and layout expert, Jay Graham, for helping us create and disseminate this newsletter.

Happy Reading!

Corey, Kathleen, and Jonathan

SECTION CHAIR'S CORNER

Darlaine Gardetto, St. Louis Community College
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As I write, ice still covers the ground here in St. Louis, but it is beginning to thaw and warmer weather promises to reach us soon. While many of us wonder if winter will ever end, key members of our section are hard at work and focused on summer, more specifically, the ASA annual meeting (August 20-23) in Las Vegas. Our section day is day four of the conference, Tuesday, August 23, and Chair-elect Jeffrey Chin and his program committee (Kathleen Lowney, Mary Senter, Victoria Stay, Barbara Walters, Amy Traver, Val Episcopo, Mari Plikuhn, Susan Ferguson) are in the process of sifting through paper submissions and putting together what I'm sure will be a thought-provoking group of panels and roundtables. Diane Pike and her pre-conference committee (Nicole Civetinni, Nancy Greenwood, Dani McCartney, David A. Purcell) are organizing the 2011 ASA Section on Teaching and Learning Pre-Conference Workshop, "The Best Teachers We Can Be: Learning Scholarly Teaching," which will be held Friday August 19 -- the day before the opening of the ASA convention. The preconference teaching workshop is a full day that begins at 8 am, so those planning to attend the pre-conference will need to arrive in Las Vegas the night before the workshop. Travel grants sponsored by Sage/Pine Forge Press may be available and the deadline for travel applications is March 1! Contact Keith Roberts, chair of the Sage/Pine Forge Award committee, at robertsk@hanover.edu for information about these grants.

David Purcell, membership chair, is working with his committee (Meghan Burke, Carolyn Corrado, Linda Rillorta, Lydia Rose) to increase our numbers. Membership has dropped off a bit—813 members in 2009 and then 747 members in 2010—and the committee is hoping to bring us back over 800 for 2011. Please help the committee and remind former members to renew and recruit new people to join. Talk to your colleagues about the benefits of section membership. Everyone who teaches sociology should be a member of the section but many do not know how much we have to offer! Recently I was speaking with a colleague about the section and how critical membership can be to sustaining connection to the discipline, especially for those of us working in places with few sociology faculty and where teaching and learning is valued but there is little support for research. My colleague was heartened by the sense of community I described and encouraged to hear that section members are made to feel welcomed and valued at ASA and at regional meetings as we bond through the respect we have for teaching/learning. Already a member of ASA, I was able to nudge my colleague to join the Section on Teaching and Learning and my next challenge is to convince her to attend ASA in Las Vegas. I know that if she does take the leap and attends ASA sessions sponsored by the Section on Teaching and Learning, she will be welcomed with open arms, just as I was many years ago. So talk to your colleagues, pull them in, convince them that they belong and encourage them to formalize that belonging through membership in the section.

I would like to end this winter thaw column continuing with the theme, "if you teach, you belong." At the beginning of the spring semester a psychology colleague and I held an adjunct faculty workshop on a sunny (but cold) Saturday afternoon at our campus. Nineteen of our approximately forty invited adjunct faculty members attended—not bad for an event that was unpaid and on a weekend. Our workshop program had two components: a discussion of online teaching and a roundtable discussion where adjunct colleagues shared within discipline groups what they considered to be their best teaching practices. This group ended the day enthusiastic and energized and looking forward to our next workshop. I raise this anecdote as a testament to the dedication of adjunct faculty in my department. I suspect that things are not far different in your departments and that you also are yourself part of, or work with, a dedicated group of adjunct faculty. Adjunct/contingent faculty members comprise a growing number of the professorate and we hope that more will join ASA and belong to our section. STLS section member, Andrea Miller, chairs an ad hoc committee on Contingent Faculty Concerns. Contact her at andreamiller31@webster.edu if you would like to learn more.

I hope that you will contact me with questions, concerns, and above all, ideas to improve our section.

Here's to spring!

Cheers,

Darlaine

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Connecting the Classroom to the Community

Leslie Hossfeld, Director Public Sociology Program
University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW)

One of the best ways to connect the classroom to the community is to physically *take* the classroom to the community. We have done just that at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. As the Director of the UNCW Public Sociology Program, I was seeking *hands-on* experience for public sociology undergraduate and graduate students, looking for opportunities to conduct research *in* and *with* the community. After three years of meetings with campus and community partners, our program has begun operating a community campus where community, students, and faculty partner and work together addressing critical issues facing resource-poor neighborhoods

In addition to the Public Sociology program, numerous other UNCW departments, such as music, art, gerontology, social work, school of education, and information technology, offer programs at the Community Campus. Almost all of the programs that are offered to residents have research agendas attached to them. In addition, the Wilmington Housing Authority-UNCW Community Campus partners with community agencies to offer programming to residents. These include: GED classes and Career Pathways courses taught by the local community college faculty; DREAMS, a non-profit arts program for children offering dance, pottery and art classes; a college counseling program; and a nutrition and community garden program provided by the Southeastern North Carolina Food Systems Program.

The UNCW Public Sociology program is designed so that undergraduate students participate in a two-semester experience that is based at the Community Campus, on the site of the Hillcrest Public Housing Community. Students have offices at the community campus and all classes are held on-site. The fall semester course is devoted to working with residents to identify critical social issues, designing a research protocol and writing a literature review. The spring semester course is a 6 hour internship course in which students carry out the proposed research. Students work directly with residents to frame the research agendas and program development. At the end of the two-semester course, students disseminate their findings through presentations to the Wilmington City Council, Wilmington Housing Authority Board of Directors, and other community stakeholders and at academic conferences. (The last cohort of Public Sociology undergraduate students reworked their final research paper and had it accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.)

Some of the other research projects have focused on food security needs for low-income residents, EBT (Electronic Debit Transfer food stamps) card use at the local farmers' markets, and identifying public transportation bus routes that meet low-income users' daily needs. In 2010, the Wilmington City Council voted to take action on research findings from the students' research, in particular, revamping public transportation bus routes in the city. Another research project involved a needs-assessment of low-income residents in a high crime area of Wilmington. A team of graduate students, faculty and public housing residents carried-out the research, interviewing residents and service providers. The findings were disseminated to a newly formed New Hanover County Blue Ribbon Commission Taskforce on Youth Violence. Recommendations from the report were instrumental in creating the Youth Empowerment Zone, a new program modeled on the successful Harlem Children's Zone.

The model for research at the WHA-UNCW Community Campus is still taking shape. The university has recognized the value in providing students with opportunities to participate in scholarly engagement. Public housing residents and UNCW administration have recognized the value in partnering with the resource-rich university in addressing the vital needs of residents. Both have adopted an approach that recognizes and values the knowledge that each bring to the table. Taking a cue from the early formative meetings, all partners are keenly aware of the problems that arise when people feel they are being researched *'on'* instead of working *'with'* researchers. The work at the Community Campus has kept this concern at the forefront of all its planning, ensuring that residents are part of every step along the way. Residents agreed that this framework best fits the spirit of the collaborative partnership that is growing at the Community Campus, and in many ways, this is the underlying model that shapes and informs the work of the WHA-UNCW Community Partnership. Results from a recent evaluation of the community campus programming suggest that the partnership is moving in that direction (Lancaster, et al, 2010).

In 2010, the WHA-UNCW Community Campus received the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officers (NAHRO) Award of Merit in Housing and Community Development. While the honor of receiving national recognition is rewarding, the partners stay grounded in the reality that the road ahead is a long one and that a lot of work still needs to be done.

References

Lancaster, K., Carrier, L., Dick, J., Dodson, E., Geen, H., Glovas, J., et al. (2010). Building Community Capacity in Resource Poor Neighborhoods: Community-University Partnerships. *Explorations: The Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities for the State of North Carolina*. Volume 5.

"Time for a New Curriculum for Social Statistics?" A Negative Answer

Michael DeCesare, Merrimack College
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It is one of the enduring questions of the last half-century in the teaching of sociology: Why should we teach social statistics to undergraduates? From my perspective, the overarching reason is to help our students become better-informed, critical thinkers. We are bombarded by statistics every day, whether it's while we're watching television or visiting web pages or reading a newspaper. In addition, of course, statistical techniques are widely used for analyzing social scientific data, and statistical results are often used to make public policy decisions. An undergraduate social statistics course, in my view, should help students gain an understanding of both the basic descriptive statistics we encounter in everyday life and some of the more advanced statistical techniques that are typically utilized by social scientists.

Salvatore Babones ("Time for a New Curriculum for Social Statistics?", Fall 2010) sees the matter differently. He is worried, quite correctly, about the disconnect between what we teach in undergraduate social statistics courses and what we do as professional sociologists. And so he suggests that statistics courses' "primary goal ought to be introducing students to at least a basic level of literacy in quantitative sociology *as practiced in the discipline today*"—which, as he puts it, is "regression, regression, regression" (emphasis mine).

The problem with this suggestion, as I see it, is in the italics. I wholeheartedly disagree with Babones' belief that

other statistical techniques are "clearly less important for our students than understanding regression." Such a belief presupposes that undergraduate sociology majors need to understand the statistics-based articles that appear in sociological journals. I make no such assumption. Few of our majors will ever see a regression—let alone conduct one of their own—after they graduate. In fact, the American Sociological Association's (ASA) recently published study of 2005 sociology graduates found that three of the five skills that those students used *least* often at their current jobs were statistical in nature: "searching for existing statistics", "using statistical software", and "discussing percentages and tests of significance in bivariate tables". And not one of the top five *most* often used skills had anything to do with statistics (see Spalter-Roth and Van Vooren 2010). Perhaps even more importantly for my purposes as a statistics instructor, I would note that too few of my students can distinguish a percentage from a proportion upon entering my introductory statistics course. For the overwhelming majority of our undergraduate students, in other words, it is clearly much more important that they learn how to conceptualize, calculate, and interpret statistics like percentages and means—those that they are confronted by every day in a variety of contexts—than how to conduct a multiple regression analysis.

Nor do I sympathize, for some of the reasons I just provided, with Babones' lament that "[m]ost undergraduate students are never exposed to multiple linear regression, which effectively means that they can't even start to understand articles from the professional literature." (I assume that he is only referring to statistics-based articles, since students are definitely not precluded from understanding more "qualitative" articles if they have not been exposed to regression.) In response, I would respectfully ask: Does it matter? So our undergraduates cannot understand the statistics-based articles that appear in sociological journals. So what? Many sociologists themselves—even some of us who teach statistics—would readily admit to being baffled by many of the statistical analyses that appear in sociological journals. Are we in any position to insist that our undergraduates comprehend them?

In addition, I can't help but wonder whether it is our job to teach our students only the material that will (supposedly) enable them to do well in terms of understanding scholarly articles that use statistics. I suppose it *is* our job, as much as it is high school teachers' job to teach their students only the material that will (supposedly) enable them to do well on statewide standardized tests. Alas, the trouble with a benchmark—be it published articles or standardized exams—is that we end up, for better or worse, teaching to it.

The practical consequences of Babones' regression-rich approach are serious: "In my curriculum," he declares, "students learn just three procedures in SPSS—frequencies, descriptive, and regression—and use these to generate all

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the results they need." All the results they need, indeed—provided that the instructor's primary goal is to turn undergraduates into copycats of professional sociologists. But what of the thousands of graduating sociology majors each year who do not attend graduate school, or land a job, in sociology? Don't they need at least a basic understanding of social statistics—percentages, frequencies, graphical presentations, measures of central tendency and dispersion, and the like? Does "regression, regression, regression" adequately prepare them, either for their careers or for the rest of their lives? I, for one, don't think so.

Our philosophical difference aside, I was surprised by two more specific aspects of Babones' article. The first is that he has "yet to meet a student whose understanding is helped by doing calculations." The overwhelming majority of my students—and this observation is based on 11-years' worth of course evaluations, conversations with students, and my colleagues' classroom visits, all of which have taken place at several different types of institution—have benefited enormously from performing hand calculations.

The standard deviation, a fundamental concept in statistics, is one example why. I introduce it to my students by discussing some of its advantages over other measures of dispersion; namely, that it increases in value as the heterogeneity of a distribution increases, that it uses every score in the distribution in its calculation, and that it standardizes the distance between any score in a distribution and that distribution's mean. What drives these conceptual points home, at least in my experience, is guiding my students through a brief derivation of the formula for the standard deviation, and then asking them to calculate a couple of standard deviations by hand and interpret them. I have used this approach to teach not only the concept of the standard deviation, but the concepts of the mean, analysis of variance, and even, yes, bivariate linear regression. And it has met with a great deal of success, at least as my students and colleagues have defined "success". But it seems to have no place in Babones' proposed statistics curriculum, which endlessly celebrates regression but eschews hand calculations.

The second surprising aspect of Babones' article, at least to me, is his claim that his students "learn how to do real professional-type analyses of the kinds they see in journals, and they love it." I wish Babones had provided some empirical evidence for his students' enjoyment of such analyses. As anyone who teaches statistics knows, a student who takes pleasure in performing a statistical analysis, especially an advanced type of analysis, is rare indeed. On a related note, I found myself wishing that Babones had described what he considers a "professional-type" statistical analysis. Many sociologists do indeed use multiple linear regression in their published research, but it is increasingly rare. Much more common are logit, probit, and other, more advanced types of regression, as are much more sophisticated regression-based method like structural equation modeling (SEM) and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). I wonder which types of analysis Babones' students are conducting.

I also take exception to one of Babones' final points. "It is safe to say," he writes, "that most students and teachers find the experience of social statistics a painful one." Perhaps he intended this as an off-handed remark, but he relies upon it to argue for drastically changing the undergraduate statistics curriculum. I would point out that there is absolutely no empirical evidence that teachers of social statistics are pained by teaching the course, and that the scant empirical evidence that exists about students is clear: most of them do *not* feel pained by taking the course (cf., DeCesare 2007).

"My instinct," Babones writes in conclusion, "is that the problem is not us, or our students, but our curriculum." His instinct is correct, insofar as it suggests that "The problem isn't the dedicated, creative teachers [of statistics]". It is equally correct that our students are not the problem. The fatal flaw in Babones' provocative argument is his conclusion: "The problem is the curriculum."

The only problem that I see in the undergraduate statistics curriculum is that *there is no problem*.

References

Babones, Salvatore J. 2010. "Time for a New Curriculum for Social Statistics?" *Teaching/Learning Matters* 39(2):6.

DeCesare, Michael. 2007. "'Statistics Anxiety' Among Sociology Majors: A First Diagnosis and Some Treatment Options." *Teaching Sociology* 35(4):360-67.

Spalter-Roth, Roberta, and Nicole Van Vooren. 2010. "Mixed Success: Four Years of Experiences of 2005 Sociology Graduates. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association. http://www.asanet.org/research/BBMixedSuccessBrief.pdf

Rejoinder

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It is a great honor to be criticized rather than simply ignored, and thus I was thrilled to read Prof. DeCesare's detailed deconstruction of my opinion piece, "Time for a New Curriculum for Social Statistics?" (Fall 2010). I am, in fact, very sympathetic to Prof. DeCesare's point of view. I would love to see our students learn how to do calculations and use percentages. Unfortunately, given the fact that all of our students have had many years of dedicated training in these activities in middle school and high school (to little avail), I am not optimistic that they will learn these skills in their sociology

coursework, nor am I persuaded that sociologists are the best people to teach them. Moreover, these are hardly competencies that are closely associated with sociology. As for the rest of the curriculum, I merely observe (based on my own experience) that most of my professional colleagues are unable to interpret the following formula:

$$s = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{(x_i - \bar{x})^2}{n-1}}$$

or to use it to calculate a standard deviation by hand, yet they can read and interpret articles that use quite advanced statistical models. I challenge Prof. DeCesare (and any other readers) to test their colleagues -- or perhaps themselves -- on this very basic formula. If (most of us) don't find formulas useful, why should we expect our students to find them useful? I'm not saying that the traditional curriculum can't be made to work; I'm suggesting that it's hard to make it work, and that this is because it's a bad curriculum. Were we designing a social statistics curriculum today, I sincerely doubt that we would include a chapter on how to read shaded tails of normal curves. Like much of the curriculum, it's there because it was convenient in 1960. It's time for a curriculum for today.

News

The Best Teachers We Can Be: Learning Scholarly Teaching

ASA 2011 Pre-Conference Teaching and Learning Workshop

Knowledge. Resources. Good Practices. Inspiration.

The ASA Section on Teaching and Learning Pre-Conference Workshop will be held from 8:00am to 5:00pm on Friday August 19th, 2011 in Las Vegas. Through engagement with experienced colleagues and with each other, keynotes, panels, discussions, roundtables and networking are designed to provide an integrated learning experience grounded in the scholarship of teaching and learning. We particularly invite colleagues at the earlier stages of their teaching careers who are particularly dedicated to the science and art of teaching sociology to become part of this community of scholarly teachers. We also include breakout sessions to support faculty at later stages of their career who are interested in sustaining and revitalizing their teaching.

Acceptances are made on a rolling basis but we would appreciate applications and registration fees no later than **June 15, 2011**; space is limited to 40 participants but a waiting list will be maintained. A non-refundable $60 registration fee covers conference materials, programming, and meals. Participants are expected to be Section members of the ASA Section on Teaching and Learning which sponsors this workshop. Early application is appreciated and ensures that there is space for you. The application form is available at http://www2.asanet.org/sectionteach/annual-mtg.html

A separate process for travel grants sponsored by Sage/Pine Forge Press is also available, and information is posted on the Section website and at www.sage.com. The deadline for travel applications is **March 1st, 2011**. For information on the travel grants, you may also contact Keith Roberts robertsk@hanover.edu

Please contact the workshop organizer, **Diane Pike**, pike@augsburg.edu for any additional information. We hope you can join us!

Call for Submissions

Teaching Symbolic Interactionism: A joint session in collaboration with the ASA's Section on Teaching and Learning.

For this session, we seek 1) presentations that demonstrate and discuss engaging lectures or exercises on Symbolic Interaction (including topical lectures where SI is applied to some substantive area or problem) and 2) pedagogical reflections on teaching and learning symbolic interaction. We see this as an opportunity for interactionists to be more deliberate in considering the unique challenges to teaching Symbolic Interaction and for us to grow as teachers by sharing our tricks of the trade. This session is a cooperative initiative with ASA's Section on Teaching and Learning. Materials from this session may also be featured on SIOnline, the SSSI's new website and member platform.

* * *

The 2011 Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction will be held Aug. 18-20 (dates tentative) in Las Vegas, Nevada. This year's theme is "The Legacy of The Chicago School."

Please be sure to include your institutional affiliation, address, e-mail, phone and fax numbers with your submission (abstracts, full papers, exercises, or lecture overviews). Submissions can be sent by March 15, 2011 to Bryce Merrill, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Indiana University South Bend, jbmerril@iusb.edu. Please contact me if you would like to participate but may need an extension of the deadline.

THE 2011 BETH B. HESS MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

The Beth B. Hess Memorial Scholarship will be awarded to an advanced sociology Ph.D. student who began her or his study in a community college or technical school. A student advanced to candidacy (ABD status) in an accredited Ph.D. program in sociology in the U.S. is eligible to apply if she or he studied at a U.S. two-year college either part-time or full-time for the equivalent of at least one full academic year that was not part of a high-school dual-enrollment program.

The Scholarship carries a stipend of $3500 from Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS) and an additional $300 from the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) to be used to support the pursuit of a Ph.D. as well as a one-year membership in SWS (including a subscription to Gender & Society) and SSSP. The Scholarship will be awarded at the summer meetings of SWS and SSSP. Recognizing Beth Hess's significant contributions to the American Sociological Association (ASA), ASA joins SWS and SSSP in supporting and celebrating the awardee at their Annual Meetings, August 13-16, 2010 in Chicago, IL. The awardee's economy class airfare, train fare or driving mileage/tolls will be paid jointly by SWS and SSSP. ASA also supports applicants for this award via their student travel award program (more than one such award may be given, but students must apply to ASA separately). Each association will also waive its meeting registration and provide complementary banquet and/or reception tickets for the awardee.

To honor Beth Hess's career, the committee will be looking for:

- Commitment to teaching, especially at a community college or other institution serving less-privileged students.
- Research and activism in social inequality, social justice, or social problems, with a focus on gender and/or gerontology being especially positive.
- Service to the academic and/or local community, including mentoring and activism.
- High quality research and writing in the proposal and letter of application.

Applications for the award should be sent electronically as a single Word or RTF file via e-mail attachment to: dcopelto@brockport.edu. Applications must contain in the following order:

1. A cover sheet with:
- Name and full contact information, including phone and email
- Current academic affiliation, with years
- Community college or technical school attended, with years and number of credits completed
- Name and contact information for graduate faculty reference
- If included, name of honored faculty member

2. A letter of application (no more than 2 pages) describing the student's decision to study sociology, commitment to teaching, career goals, research agenda, service and activism that would help the committee to see how the Scholarship would be a fitting honor
3. Full curriculum vitae, including all schools, degrees awarded, years of study, and full or part-time status in each
4. (Optional) A one-page letter describing a community/technical college faculty member who contributed in a significant way to the decision to study sociology or pursue higher education

Applicants should also arrange for the following to be sent directly either electronically via e-mail attachment or in hard copy:

1. A letter confirming advancement to candidacy (ABD status) in a sociology Ph.D. program and aid award, if any
2. A letter of recommendation from a sociologist
3. Transcript (official or unofficial) from the community or technical college attended

Only the enrollment confirmation, letter of recommendation, and transcript will be accepted in hard copy. Electronic copies of these materials are preferred and should be sent directly by the individual or institution supplying them. Hard copies can be mailed directly to:

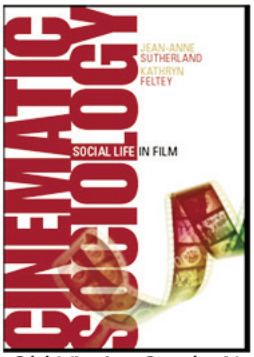
Dr. Denise Copelton
Department of Sociology
The College at Brockport, State University of NY
350 New Campus Dr.
Brockport, NY 14420

To be considered, all application materials (electronic and hard copy) must be received by midnight on April 1, 2011.

For further information contact Denise Copelton at: dcopelto@brockport.edu

New Books

Cinematic Sociology: Social Life in Film. Edited by Jean-Anne Sutherland and Kathryn Feltey. Pine Forge Press, 2010.



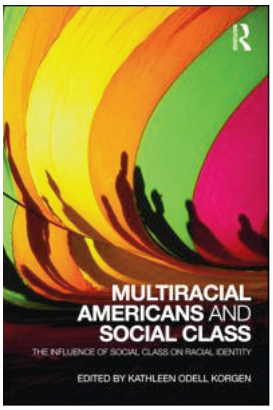
Cinematic Sociology is a one-of-a-kind text that helps students "see" films sociologically and develop critical thinking and analytical skills. The 15 essays from scholars in sociology and cultural studies explore the ways social life is presented—distorted, magnified, or politicized— in popular film. Presenting a variety of classic and current films such as *Forty Year Old Virgin*, *Crash*, *North Country*, and *Boyz in the Hood*, this book helps students to view films sociologically while also providing pedagogy for teaching sociology through film. Each essay uses one or more feature films to illustrate key

topics in sociology: social class, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, work and family, global connections, and social change and the environment. Sociological concepts such as identity, interaction, inequality, and social institutions are analyzed across the essays. Instructors are provided with an innovative and engaging method for teaching sociology; students are taught to see film as a type of text that can be analyzed and critiqued. To order a review copy go to:

http://www.pineforge.com/books/Book232179#tabview=title

Multiracial Americans and Social Class. Edited by Kathleen Odell Korgen. Routledge, 2010.

As the racial hierarchy shifts and inequality between Americans widens, it is important to understand the impact of social class on the rapidly growing multiracial population. *Multiracial Americans and Social Class* is the first book on multiracial Americans to do so and fills a noticeable void in a growing market.



In this book, noted scholars examine the impact of social class on the racial identity of multiracial Americans in highly readable essays from a range of social scientific perspectives. In doing so, they answer the following questions: What is the connection between class and race? Do you need to be middle class in order to be an 'honorary white'? What is the connection between social class and culture? Do you need to 'look' white or just 'act' white in order to be treated as an 'honorary white'? Can social class influence racial identity? How does the influence of social class compare across multiracial backgrounds?

Multiracial Americans and Social Class is a key text for undergraduate and postgraduate students, researchers and academics in the fields of Sociology, Race and Ethnic Studies, Race Relations, and Cultural Studies.

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Using Videos in the Classroom: Pedagogy and The Sociological Cinema

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The Internet, and especially video-streaming sites such as YouTube, has greatly expanded our access to videos for use in our classrooms. However, these digital warehouses and their seemingly unlimited content from so many different sources often make it difficult for instructors to efficiently find useful clips for the classroom. We can easily lose hours browsing videos that have marginal relevance or poor quality, or we can simply get distracted by the latest batch of viral videos. So, back in early fall of 2009, we began collecting and cataloguing video clips we found useful in our own classrooms. In the hopes of helping out other sociology instructors, we built a website, *The Sociological Cinema*, around these videos and added space for a blog, class assignments, and other video-related content. Along the way, we have drawn explicitly upon the scholarship of teaching and learning to better develop our pedagogy, which is the topic of this short article.

While we have personally found videos very effective for engaging students in unique ways, a growing body of evidence supports this conclusion and even expands on it. According to sociologist Michael Miller (2009), "[videos'] most critical function in terms of cognitive learning appears to lie in their capacity to serve as representational applications for key course ideas." For example, an excerpt from a CNN broadcast on the propagation of closed circuit television cameras (CCTVs) is very useful for encouraging students to apply Foucault's theories of surveillance and discipline, and an episode from the popular television show *Wife Swap* works well to illustrate Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital.

Carefully selected videos can also facilitate experiential learning (Kolb and Fry 1975; Kolb 1984). In the context of experiential learning (and teaching), experience "usually implies that individuals have, or are given, in the teaching and learning process a direct or simulated encounter with the external world" (Jarvis et al. 2004: 55). The strengths of such an approach is that this encounter is experienced on multiple levels simultaneously—including the physical, cognitive, emotional, and even spiritual. While such experience might be primary (such as with service learning or civic engagement projects), it can also be secondary, where it is mediated through technology (i.e. video) and not the immediate social context. In short, "movies engage our psychological faculties in profound and unique ways ... they serve to condense much of significance into a relatively brief and isolated experience" (McGinn 2005: 14). The popular TV series *The Wire* (clearly the best television show of

all-time!) serves as a good example. Gang bangers and drug dealers, characters who might normally incite disgust among a general audience, are seen as human and shaped by their disadvantaged social circumstances. Through masterful storytelling and pitch-perfect dialogue, the viewer develops empathy and fondness for the characters (e.g., consider the character of Omar), and begins to understand their situations in light of concentrated poverty, police ineffectiveness, corrupt local governments, broken families, a dysfunctional educational system, and the distortions of local media that shape their lives and keep them mired in a vicious cycle of poverty and crime. The characters' stories stimulate viewers at affective, cognitive, and emotional levels, perhaps achieving a secondary experience of poverty, crime, and the myriad of institutions governing the characters' lives. As such, clips from the show can serve as the basis of concrete experiences, reflected upon and abstracted to course concepts and discussions (Kolb 1984).

Recent scholarship also demonstrates that videos can improve student engagement in class material (Wynn 2009). This fits with our own experiences as sociology instructors. Using open-ended in-class evaluations of videos, we found that students believed videos were important in helping them draw connections to their own life experiences, that they connected class material to "real life" more generally, and that the videos met a need for a surprising number of students who believe they are "visual learners." Today's undergraduates, dubbed the "net generation," have only known life with online videos and other multimedia; they engage this media in their everyday lives and increasingly expect such media to be integrated within their classes (Oblinger and Oblinger 2005).

While growing numbers of students are thriving in environments saturated with visual media, it is crucial to keep in mind that the dark side of this development is a growing proclivity among students to uncritically absorb ideas about the social world through such media. Educators would do well to address the net generation's demand for information through visual media, but not without insisting on greater media literacy. So while a documentary on social class in the United States might be useful for setting up a discussion about the film's chosen topic, it is also useful to push against the representations offered in the film. Students can be asked how the story might have been different if the filmmakers explored the intersections between social class and other categories, such as gender, race, or sexuality.

More than promoting media literacy or rousing student engagement, videos offer the opportunity to introduce humor and levity into the classroom, which often has the effect of relieving student self-consciousness (Bingham and Hernandez 2009). Instructors may then seek to integrate clips from the *Colbert Report* or *The Onion* and encourage students to analyze social expectations and why a failure to conform often makes us laugh. For instance, after showing a two-minute mock commercial, which aims to sell "Bronte Sisters Power Dolls" to children, we have asked students to reflect on why they find the commercial funny. The clip features three women action figures wearing 19th century dresses, which drape at their ankles. Charlotte (*Jane Eyre*), Emily (*Wuthering Heights*), and Anne Bronte (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) want their novels to be published, but they are thwarted by condescending male publishers. The pitchman narrates the spot with all the speed and energy typically used to sell to young boys, but by the end, we learn that the Bronte sisters overcome the patriarchy with their "boomerang book-throwing action" and "barrier-breaking feminist vision." When asked why the clip is funny, students inevitably mention the various ways in which their gender-based expectations were violated. Even among children's toys, if girls and women are depicted as action figures they are often sexualized with pronounced busts and exposed skin. Lara Croft never wore an ankle-length dress.

Each of the clips we have catalogued on *The Sociological Cinema* is tagged with sociological themes length, a way to access the video, and includes a summary of the clip with suggestions about how to use it in the classroom. While some clips have obvious uses (e.g. excerpts from Jackson Katz's documentary, "Tough Guise," are unmistakably useful in a class on the sociology of gender because the clips explicitly demonstrate how hegemonic masculinity hurts men as well as women), the utility of a good number of other clips is only apparent because of the intellectual con-

tent or teaching suggestions we attach to those clips. For instance, *The Sociological Cinema* links to an eight-minute documentary designed to laud the efforts of fair trade coffee producers, but we have posted this clip and suggested it be used as an effective way to teach students about Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. Through such analyses, the site works as a resource that refuses to consume culture at face value. In addition to providing students with a firm foundation of sociological concepts and theories while also developing their sociological imaginations, these brief analyses of clips and the teaching suggestions we offer are challenges to the usual meanings assigned to them through popular culture. Such analyses help combat the messages that bombard students on a daily basis, both inside and outside the classroom, facilitating the development of critical thinking skills.

The focus of the site is on short video clips (<10 minutes), but videos may be up to one hour in length. The site also allows instructors to comment on their experience using particular videos and assignments. Finally, there are pages devoted to our blog, video-related scholarship on teaching and learning, assignments, and a form that allows instructors to submit new video clips to the site. If you find your way onto our site, we hope you enjoy it, and please help us build the cinema by contributing a video you have found useful in your own classes.

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Sustaining Commitment to Teaching in a Cynical World

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Excellent teaching involves caring, compassion, openness, and accessibility, and it requires significant investment of energy and passion. In short, being a committed and engaged instructor involves an element of vulnerability. When one expends ones energies and tries to be open to others, one is exposed.

The fact is that, sooner or later, virtually every one of us gets wounded. Deans or department chairs may clobber us, colleagues may stab us in the back, students may be apathetic about our beloved discipline and indifferent to our efforts, and other students may trash us in course evaluations. Many students—especially first years—are rational choice theorists who try to get the most reward with the least investment. For us, sociology has *meaning*—it *matters*. We seek to construct knowledge in the classroom, and indifference to the process is enervating.

In the face of these situations, it is easy to become cynical—to become negative toward students or to become apathetic toward our institutions. This cynicism, however, stifles excellent teaching. It drains our energies. Continuing to give our best when it is unappreciated seems irrational….even foolish.

Here are two scenarios of this kind of demoralization. In early June I ran into "Bart"—a really fine colleague who gives his heart, his intellect, and his energies to teaching. I asked him how his summer was going and he replied, "I am just so glad I do not have to see any students until September. I just read my course evaluations, and the students so completely bludgeoned me that it will take me three months before I can face another class." It turned out that it was actually about a sixth of the class that had said some pretty cruel things, but the negative feedback is often what we take to heart and remember. Bart was so hurt that he needed time to recover before he could teach another class.

A friend of mine from another college had an experience with her administration that took the wind out of her sails. Deb had lined up to be the next faculty member to teach abroad in the college's exchange program. She had planned for months, her husband had arranged to have time off from his work, the family had their passports, and plans for the children to withdraw from the local schools were completed. Deb was really excited, but a few months before they were to leave, the administration notified her that her teaching exchange had been cancelled. She would not be going to Asia. She would have been the first woman to go on this exchange with her family, and it was not clear whether the issue was her gender, or having a family along, or her research agenda. The administration would tell her nothing. She was devastated, demoralized, angry, and enervated by it. She could hardly muster the energy to

teach her classes and she knew she was not at her best in the classroom.

Deb called her close friend and mentor and asked to meet. If anyone could help her recover, it was Janet. They made an appointment, but before they could meet, her key pillar—the person who helped her maintain her spirits when she was down—was killed in an automobile accident. How was she ever going to recover her spirits, regain her commitment to teach in this place she no longer trusted, and give her heart when her efforts were so unsupported and unappreciated?

I have done workshops at professional meetings on combating cynicism, and it has been interesting how nearly every attendee has a story to tell. The specifics vary, but the experience of being demoralized by students, a colleague, or an administrator has been a common one. If cynicism is the first step to burnout and apathy, how do we keep from going there?

In the sociology of religion, scholars have long been interested in how people can continue to believe things that seem improbable and irrational. Why do people continue to affirm that the gods are coming in flying saucers? How is it possible for people to continue to affirm their faith in goodness when they are being abused and tortured by others and their families killed? When a millenarian movement predicts the end of the world, how can people continue to believe the leader after the "expiration date" has already passed? Many do maintain the faith, but only if the "plausibility structures" are strong enough. ***Plausibility structures*** are social and symbolic systems that allow social constructions to seem plausible—even compelling—in spite of contrary evidence (Roberts and Yamane 2011; Berger 1967; Berger and Luchman 1966). People will continue to love, to forgive, to offer compassion, and to stand up for justice, even in the face of overwhelming odds and extraordinary meanness. To do so, however, they need a very strong plausibility structure.

So maybe what we need in this profession are some plausibility structures that make it seem reasonable to care about our students and our teaching—even if it makes us vulnerable to being hurt again. How can plausibility structures about teaching inoculate us against cynical thinking and negativity?

Plausibility Structures at Work

The first and most central component of a plausibility structure is a *community* of people that become a reference group. This community is able to affirm and sustain attitudes contrary to the "conventional wisdom." Once a group becomes a powerful reference group, getting together with those people restores one's balance, energizes one for the stressors and "battles" ahead, and re-centers one around the values that one wants to affirm. For example, I often create teaching groups of colleagues who care about teaching at my campus. Sometimes we read a book together, or we just talk about teaching issues over a brown-bag lunch. The key is to have peers who care about students and have a positive outlook. Being around such people "restoreth my soul."

I also find that I depend on my "fix" of being around teaching-committed people at my regional association meetings and at the ASA Section on Teaching and Learning. Associating with many of the very people who are reading this essay is energizing. I go back in the classroom reaffirming that it makes sense to care and to give my best, even though I may well get clobbered once again. My reference group reminds me that it is "the right thing to do." In short, when my social construction of reality (that teaching really is worth the effort and that it matters) seems in doubt, my teaching friends help that construction to seem plausible and compelling. If you do not have such a community, I recommend that you create one!

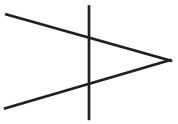
Religious communities also have myths that sacralize a worldview. Myths are stories that transmit values and perspectives, and they always carry truth. If a myth has no truth to it, it is not a myth; it is merely a fable. Factual accuracy or inaccuracy is not the point of a myth; the truth is in the values and perspectives that they transmit. Most of us have stories of transformative learning—either experiences we have had as students or as professional educators. We cherish memories of favorite teachers, and such stories of transformative learning can be inspiring. One can also relive personal moments by maintaining a "feel-good file"—letters and notes sent by students that can be pulled out and re-read when needed. Those stories take on a mythical quality by saying, "Yes, the risk-taking does have a benefit; it's worth it."

Religious groups often reenact myths through rituals. Indeed, myths and symbols have a symbiotic relationship with rituals, each contributing to the sacralization of the other. One element of ritual is music, which often makes certain ideas seem so sacred that they are beyond question—they are plausible and compelling. In other instances, music can have a calming effect that allows one to re-center—to remember who one genuinely wants to be. Some faculty find that the last day of a break—before classes start—is a bit of a downer. I have found that I need course preparation rituals the night before the term begins. I focus on the transformative *potential* of the course and listen to music that helps me re-center and become my more humane self. In short, I have rituals that provide an "attitude adjustment." I always seem to enter the class the next day energized, focused, and positive.

One of the most powerful plausibility structures in religious communities are symbols. Edwin Leach (1972) once compared a symbol to a computer chip. Computer chips store a phenomenal amount of information. So do symbols. A cross, for example, has meaning for members of the Christian community because it reminds them of a sacred story, a particular life, a divine event, and the history of a movement. Others may experience negative memories in

relationship to that same symbol, but the symbol delivers much information, and it does so with powerful emotional content. Whether the symbol is the Star of David, the eight-spoked wheel, or a national flag, it stores both content and emotions.

One person I know uses a symbol from the Ecumenical Institute in the 1970s. It is a mathematical symbol, reconstructed here:



This symbol says to this friend: **the past** (on the left) **is NOT greater than the future** (which he imagines on the right). This reminds him to avoid becoming nostalgic for the "good old days"—when students were supposedly smarter, kinder, harder working, and more appreciative. He looks at that symbol before leaving his office to go to class. He refuses to denigrate the current group of students and idealize a former cohort.

Another acquaintance told me that he is intrigued with the sign of the cross. Although the sign is often not made correctly by religious people, it is apparently supposed to involve touching the forehead, the chest, and then both shoulders—the limbs. The idea is that the faith informs how one thinks, how one feels, and how one acts. My acquaintance believes that effective education should engage the mind, the emotions, and ultimately behavior. Not being especially "religious," he does a truncated version of that sign—touching his forehead, his heart, and one arm before he goes out of his office. It is a reminder that he wants his teaching to be more than short term memorization. This symbolic act reminds him of his longstanding focus as a teacher.

I mentioned early in this essay that Deb's good friend and mentor was killed in an auto accident right at the time when she especially needed her. It just happened that at precisely that same time, one of her students gave Deb a bracelet. It was one of those WWJD bracelets—which stands for "What would Jesus do?" In the Christian community it is supposed to remind one to always think of Jesus when making decisions. Deb found that bracelet to be deeply meaningful—though she reconstructed the meaning for the symbol. She would often look at the bracelet in her down moments and think, "What would *Janet* Do?" She found it sustaining to remember Janet's deep commitment to students.

I also have a bit of ritual that I use—in connection to a symbol. I have an original linocut by Robert O. Hodgell called *The Professor*. It is a highly satirical image—quite an impersonal and pompous figure pontificating to anyone and to no one. (See photo below.) I stop for five seconds as I go out the door to meet each class, and I remind myself that I do <u>not</u> want to look like that—ever! It becomes a negative reminder of what teaching at its worst might look like. It is a bit like touching my head, heart, and limbs as a reminder to be authentic and humane with my students.

The Professor by Robert O. Hodgell
www.pchodgell.com/site/
Used with permission of P. C. Hodgell.

If we become cynical, we lose our passion, our commitment, our openness, and our source of energy for teaching each new cohort. Getting stabbed in the back or being kicked in the teeth a few times can quickly foster negativity and cynicism. The antidote is to build some plausibility structures that remind us that students do matter, and that we professors are privileged people who get to work with young minds and things of the mind. Reminding myself of this helps me sustain my own commitment to teaching… as I smile through "missing" teeth.

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