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We're All In This Together - Or Are We? Community and Commitment in American Life 2005 SOM Conference – October 6-7, 2005

Marriott Hotel Minneapolis West, St. Louis Park

Sessions & Activities: Student, Academic and Applied Session

- How to Choose and Apply to Grad School, Student Poster Session
- Paper Sessions, Panel Discussions, Current Research
- Teaching Workshop, Service Learning Resources

The 2005 Sociologists of Minnesota conference will take place October 6-7 at the Marriott Hotel Minneapolis West, St. Louis Park.

Call for Organizers

Sociologists of Minnesota is looking for innovative proposals to gather sociologists to discuss our work, share ideas, problem-solve, and see what's new. Come share your work in a variety of formats:

Paper Presentations are a wonderful way to disseminate current research, either academic or applied. You will be given 15-20 minutes of a session to present your research, with time for the audience to ask questions.

Field Presentations are the place to tell us about your organization, what you do, and how your work affects the community or the industry in which you work. You will be given up to 30 minutes of a session to showcase what you or your organization does, innovation in your field, or how you were able to resolve a pressing issue in your organization or in the community.

Work Circles give you the opportunity to meet others doing your type of work in other areas or other types of organizations and talk about common issues and ideas. Bring your questions, challenges, or ideas to share with others in this lively 90-minute session. Build your network of professional contacts. Work Circle Coordinators select an issue facing their workplace (such as assessing outcomes in schools or changes in evaluating employee performance), write a short description of this focus, and publicize the work circle to others interested in the topic both in and outside of Sociology.

Career Development sessions will give you a fresh perspective on your career path, be it in a corporate, nonprofit or academic setting. Come share your strategies for making it - and pick up a few new tips for getting ahead!

Poster Sessions are colorful, sometimes three-dimensional ways to engage your audience and talk about your work.

All areas of sociological focus and practice are welcome, however, sessions organized by and/or relating to topics of interest to students, as well as sessions pertaining to the conference theme, are particularly encouraged.

Proposals to be received by August 15, 2005.

Please send all proposals to:
Joan Vitek Hiller
Social Research Associates, Inc.
5638 Glen Avenue
Minnetonka, MN 55345
952-974-1003 (h) 952-974-0892 (w)

 **Caroline Rose Student Paper Competition Winners** 

Graduate Division

1st Prize

Melissa F. Weiner, University of Minnesota—Twin Cities

“Integration and Educational Welfare: Black Activists’ Preferences towards the New York City Public Schools, 1950-1960.”

Abstract

Much of the sociological and historical literature with regards to integration of America’s public schools takes for granted first, that all black parents wanted integration, and second, that the reasons for this included desires for assimilation in addition to access to better quality schooling. Similarly, most authors fail to differentiate the interests of the most outspoken groups involved in this struggle, civil rights organizations, with those of community based groups such as parents. This project examines the interests of various segments of the black community of New York City during the 1950s, a time often perceived as being one of quiet consensus, using contemporary black newspaper accounts of protests. I seek to determine the interests of black activists with regard to public schools during this era. Findings suggest a clear difference between the desires of civil rights organizations and community-based parents with the former articulating desires for abstract ideals of integration and the latter far more intent on desires for improved educational welfare. These findings have a number of implications for contemporary theorists and researchers as well as those concerned with educational policy for minority students.

2nd Prize

Eric Bonds, Minnesota State University, Mankato

“The Structure of Social Movement Opportunities.”

Abstract

In this paper I argue that the widely-held conception of political opportunity, central to the political process model’s of understanding of social movements, is unable to account for the emergence of contemporary forms of anti-corporate activism. In order to improve this concept, I suggest that scholars consider social movement opportunities at other levels of social interaction than just the nation-state. I also suggest that the political process model should pay more heed to long-standing social movements to better explain the emergence of new forms of activism. Finally, I suggest that, rather than considering opportunity as something that exists only in the objective world, scholars should think of social movement opportunities also as social constructions. This new conception would include both the objective world and social movement actors’ interpretations of that world. As actors forge new interpretations, they may bring forth new forms of activism and new social movements.

Undergraduate Division

1st Prize

Lindsey Johnson, Bethel College

“Informal Social Networks within a Latino Church: Meeting physical, emotional, and social needs of immigrant church members, and implications for Anglos in cross-cultural ministry.”

Abstract

This case study examines how a Minneapolis Latino church creates community among immigrant church members. Based on research by Ebaugh and Chafetz, I theorize that immigrant church members will form informal networks to meet members’ needs. I conducted qualitative research through six weeks of participant observation and six in-depth interviews. In addition to meeting physical, emotional, and social needs, these networks provide validation of culture and spiritual identity. The findings of this study have implications for the larger community of Latino churches as well for Anglos desiring to engage in cross-cultural ministry.

2nd Prize

Nikolas L. Proehl, Minnesota State University, Mankato

“Tattooing as a Model of Changing Moral Boundaries.”

Abstract

This study examines tattooing as a basis for understanding moral passage. Moral passage occurs when a social act undergoes a transformation from an undesirable or deviant act, to one that is generally tolerated or accepted by the greater society. Interviews were conducted with individuals who have received tattoos, and their experiences and encounters with others in social settings were documented and analyzed. Results indicate that while individuals often undergo tattooing because of their attraction to its deviant connotations, many of these same individuals do not regard themselves to be deviant. At the Same time, persons, with tattoos typically find toleration and even encouragement from others, but many remain hesitant to reveal the presence of their tattoos in certain situations. These and other findings indicated that the moral boundaries of tattooing vary along familial, subcultural, situational, and other dimensions, and that individuals with tattoos therefore find themselves in interactions on both the conventional and the deviant sides of these moral boundaries.

 **Congratulations!** 

➤ Mark Carey – Conference Keynote Presentation ➤

“Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about the corrections profession. As a field of study, sociology touches on a wide range of subjects and helps us understand how we function as a society. In many ways, corrections gives us an opportunity to learn more about ourselves individually and as a people than most fields. How we deal with those who harm us, and how this interaction shapes us speaks volumes about who we are as a people.

When I entered into the corrections field I was given sparse orientation and hands-on training. I was immediately struck with the realization that although much of my college instruction was good foundational material it did not help me in my on-the-job work.... at least, not at first. Back then, in the 1970's, we operated mostly on gut, on common sense, on previous experiences. It was not necessarily built on a careful design. We did not apply much research to the work that we did.

Much as changed since then. And, much as stayed the same. A significant change since the 1970's has been the amount of knowledge accumulated about human behavior. We know more now than ever, largely due to the abundant research that has been conducted in the 1990's to current. We now know what works in reducing recidivism. We know that we can expect an average reduction in reconviction by thirty percent if we apply that knowledge and skill with fidelity. We have never been so informed, or been given such clear guidance, and the potential is exciting.

However, the state of affairs in correction is not necessarily all well and good. It continues to be fraught with problems ranging from unrest to budget cuts to overcrowding to poor training. At the same time, there is reason for hope. My title for this talk is The Corrections Heel, and within this subject matter I will be covering three areas, all from a practitioner's point of view: The Heel of Oppression, the Achilles Heel, the Healing Promise

Heel of Oppression

Let's start with the Heel of Oppression. The latest federal Bureau of Justice Statistics numbers are staggering and give us reason to be alarmed: sixty seven percent of all prison releasees are rearrested. That's right: two out of every three are picked up by law enforcement for an alleged new crime. Two out of three fail to integrate into society in a lawful way. How could this happen? Did not the prison experience teach them a valuable lesson on the consequences of crime? Do they not learn new skills in prison to keep them from returning? Is it possible that in our efforts to bring about safety that we are actually making people worse? If that is not bad enough, according to research disseminated recently by Dr. Faye Taxman, recidivism rates are on the rise both in probation and parole over the past twenty year period.

How could this be, especially in light of the fact that our knowledge level on how to change human behavior is increasing? Let me offer some observations. Despite significant advancements in our knowledge about what works in helping individuals become more pro-social in their orientation and behavior, the corrections field is under siege with too much work and too little resources. In other cases, it has been whipsawed back and forth with new political direction. And, for yet other situations, it has been stable but has stubbornly refused to change. Despite embarrassing recidivism

numbers, the corrections field too often holds onto old, tired, and ineffective practices.

I am going to offer some observations from my experience in the corrections business and being a national consultant for the past fifteen years. But before I do I want to make one thing perfectly clear. Some of my comments will be critical of the field of corrections, the very field I have given twenty-five years of my professional life. This should not be misconstrued as criticism of my colleagues. It is rarely about individuals, it is rather a comment about the culture of corrections. Minnesota has one of the best and most humane institutions in the country. I'm not saying that the State is without problems. But, I have seen firsthand what goes on and who works here and I have nothing but admiration. These public servants put their own safety on the line every day that they enter these institutions or our communities to supervise offenders. It is a real danger. And, they are able to do their work with professionalism day in and day out. I know each of the wardens and probation directors in Minnesota and many across the country. They are knowledgeable, dedicated professionals. I am proud to be associated with them. They often work in difficult environments, with lower pay than they could acquire in the private job market, and are subject to second-guessing and criticism. Yet, they show up every day, put on their best face, and do the hard, unsung work.

However, whenever there is a coercive environment, where authority and force is used to control behavior, there exists a culture that contributes to this troubling trend of high recidivism. There are two kinds of oppression I am talking about:

1. The Oppression that comes from abuse of power because there are some bad apples, or more likely because there is neglect on the part of leadership that allows this kind of oppression to thrive.
2. The culture of Oppression. This exists despite the compassion and professionalism of staff. It exists because safety is the first concern and rules and procedures are put in place to reduce the chance that something could go awry.

Let's take a quick look at this oppression from an abuse of power point of view. Fortunately, this does not happen as often as it used to and, to the best of my knowledge, it happens seldom in Minnesota. But, it happens. Consider this: in a probation office in Connecticut there is a sign for all probationers to read when they enter the lobby. It is short and to the point. It says, “Sign in, Sit Down, and Shut Up.” In a field where coercion and authority is exercised, the danger of oppression is a cohabitant. Treating people as if they have no right to respect is oppressive to the receiver and should be morally reprehensible to the observer. It is ineffective in that it does not contribute toward positive behavior change. If anything, it is counter-contributory. And, it is poisonous to the agency culture in that it says that since you have power over others you are allowed to wield that power in a heavy handed way not because it is necessary to protect life but because it shows the offender who is boss and who is in charge. In this case, I don't blame the individual who made and posted the sign, I blame the leadership that allows this kind of attitude to be displayed. It is a matter of power going to the head and not paying attention to the organizational culture where this can happen very easily, where offenders can be reduced to something less than human.

There also exists a culture of oppression that flows naturally from the nature of the business. In a study by quoted by Dr. Martin

Seligman in his best selling book, "Learned Optimism," he notes that inmates are more depressed upon release from prison than when they first enter prison. At first, I was incredulous. Why? Why would an inmate feel more depressed when they are about to experience freedom for the first time in years? As a warden at the women's prison in Shakopee, Minnesota I would often quote this study to the new inmates at orientation. Every time I asked them the question of which inmate was more depressed, the one entering or the one leaving, they got the answer correct. They understood the fear of stepping out into a society that has changed, to a family and support system that has deteriorated due to their own poor decisions. But, I also have to believe that the environment of prison contributes to this condition.

I moved from the field of probation to being a warden having little exposure to the prison life. I had no real idea of what I was getting into. I discovered many, experienced and highly professional staff who worked tirelessly in a difficult environment to make things work. But, I also discovered a set of conditions that eat away at humanity. Let me give you a few small examples based on my first couple of months on the job.

An offender sent me a kite (i.e., an in-house memo) complaining that the officers would not let her keep a bible that she received in the mail from a spiritual mentor in the community. I went separately to the Lieutenant, Captain, Associate Warden and even to the Chaplain and got the same answer each time. It was against policy. At one point, in exasperation I asked, "What is the purpose of prison?" "Are we not supposed to help the offender find resources that promote pro-social behavior so they don't return to prison? The last I checked, the Bible contained good messages of compassion, humility, and empathy." I heard the reasoning: it would take too long to search through each item. Someone might try to smuggle drugs in.

Next scenario. A woman was banging her head against the wall in response to not getting what she wanted. Prison staff is expected to stop any self-destructive behavior. So, they intervened over and over again, day after day. It totally consumed staff. Nothing worked. We escalated the response but that didn't work. Eventually, the psych director suggested that we consider her personality profile and instead of using the restraint chair that actually psychologically reinforced what she was seeking by the behavior, that we give her more control over the situation. He suggested that we tell her that if she is feeling like she is going to lose control and bang her head she could request the chair in advance. His speculation was that this kind of self-empowerment would stop the behavior. Since nothing else was working, I supported the plan. Security personnel, however, objected stating that "we can't start to let the inmates tell us when we use our equipment or technique. We have to be in control and this gives the wrong message to the offender."

Last scenario. As a public institution, we are asked to give tours. Often, I give the tour myself. In this case, a college class requested to visit and since this is for educational purposes we granted it. I took them around the prison and into one of the housing units. At one point, some of the students struck up a conversation with a group of female inmates. One student asked, "What is it like to go to segregation?" The inmates' answer was: "It's no big deal. In fact, I kind of like it. When I need a break from the others I get thrown into seg. That way, I can relax, read, or sleep and no one bugs me."

As it turns out, there are very logical reasons why the system responded to these situations the way they did. However, it does beg a few questions. Who is really controlling what goes on in these environments? Does learning occur or is it all about controlling behavior for the short term? Does the institutional response to an anti-social behavior create an obligation by the offender to think through what happened or how to change it? Or, are we punishing the behavior and assuming that learning occurred?

It is our history that created these cultures. These responses were designed due to past experiences in order to produce the safest environment possible. They are understandable. But, a sixty seven percent re-arrest rate raises the question of whether it always has to be that way.

Last week I visited Lookout Mountain in Colorado. The residents are largely there for violent crimes. They are between 16 and 21 years of age, a profile much like Red Wing. At Lookout Mountain, they have created something called a "normative culture" where everyone's behavior is expected to fall in line with a set of community norms or values. They all hold each other accountable to these values. The entire culture is based on respect. They are taught (staff and offenders alike) that this is their community and they have a responsibility to treat each other like members of their own community. When a resident acts out they don't just punish the offender. They expect that there will be personal growth and restoration. After all, the acting out violates the norms and creates an obligation to those affected by the behavior. So, for example, they created the 20/20 program. This program requires a resident who violates a major community norm to approach five residents and five counselors for four days in a row to explain what he did, how he harmed the community, and what he intends to do to repair the harm and avoid it from happening again. The twenty individuals listen, critique the plan, and support the offender. Why don't we do this in our prisons? Officials can still be firm, set boundaries, and hold each other accountable but do so with the idea that we are in this together.

I fear that in our effort to be safe, we have created cultures of housing that are counterproductive to pro-social thinking and behaving.

It is easy to just look at behavior and assume that it was always that way. That is, offenders have always anti-social; they made choices that precludes any responsibility we have to understand how they got there. This was discussed in a research study quoted by the author of *The Tipping Point*. In this study, one group of individuals watched a video tape of another group shooting a basketball. These players made the majority of their shots. Another tape showed a second group of players who missed most of their shots. When the observers were asked what explains the difference they stated that one group of basketball players were more skilled than the other. When the researchers pointed out that the lighting in the gym on the second tape was significantly dimmer, the observers did not sway in their opinion about skills. Circumstances did not play a factor in their judgment. Outcomes are explained through individual attributes much more than environmental conditions.

Consider this emphasis on individual attributes when applied to corrections. I am going to describe an offender's life and circumstances. Let's call her Lydia.

In a prison report, a roommate had an epileptic seizure. When the officer entered and asked Lydia why she didn't press the call button she responded by saying, "What do you think I am, a Good Samaritan?" The officer states, "Yes, you are responsible to respond when your roommate has a medical problem." The inmate says, "Well, she woke me up" to which the officer retorts, "I don't care, you need to do something." Finally, the conversation ends when the inmate says, "I'm a drug dealer, I don't do that."

From all appearances, this offender seems like a hard-core offender who is callous, and probably has always been that way. Now, zoom back twenty-five years.

- ❖ For the first three years of her life Lydia was in a good environment. Her nutrition and emotional development was sufficient for her healthy brain development. She acquired some assets, an above average IQ and good verbal skills.
- ❖ Lydia lived in an impoverished neighborhood but her mother and live-in father (not married) and two siblings managed to get by, on the edge. Her mother used drugs but it was somewhat under control.
- ❖ Then, her mother's boyfriend's drug abuse worsened, erupting into violence and a chaotic life. Lydia's mother eventually turned to selling drugs and prostitution to pay for her habit.
- ❖ Lydia's boyfriend (Lydia's father) abandoned the family.
- ❖ Mother had a series of boyfriends who came in and out of the living environment.
- ❖ Now age 10, Lydia grew in resentment and vowed never to live this way.
- ❖ At age 11, Lydia was sexually abused, repeatedly, by one of mom's boyfriends.
- ❖ At age 12, this same boyfriend was still around and forced her to perform sexual acts for others for pay.
- ❖ At age 13, she ran away. Unfortunately those she knew exploited her as this was their lifestyle as well. To support herself Lydia exchanged sexual favors and was a drug runner.
- ❖ By the time Lydia reached age 16 she had been arrested a number of times, and had a child. She attempted to live the straight life when she delivered her daughter but her friends continued to use her for drugs and prostitution. She was not strong enough to resist these influences.
- ❖ Still age 16, Lydia lost her child due to careless drug use. She left drugs on the coffee table, passed out, and her daughter ingested it.
- ❖ Lydia was arrested, her child deceased. Hope drained from her.
- ❖ For the next few years Lydia was in and out of correctional programs. In each case file it reads, "bad attitude." This attitude and poor cooperation resulted in a harsh response from corrections. She spent most of her institutional time in segregation. She began to get a reputation for being a "hard ass" which was the first time she remembered being complemented for something.
- ❖ By now, her anger had hardened and her attitude was set.
- ❖ When she was last released (before coming to prison) she decided to go into business for herself. She had the brains and guts to become a drug dealer.

Now, she is in prison, lost one child to death, and another to child protection. She has lost self-respect. The only social support she has is anti-social support. No one cared for her after age three, why should she care for her prison roommate?

Achilles Heel

The research is clear: meaningful community involvement and support is a key to successful outcomes. Corrections can put in

place effective programs that do make a difference, that provides new skills and experiences, that offers alternative world views, that builds on offender strengths, but, if the offender returns to a criminogenic neighborhood where anti-social attitudes are the norm, that investment is likely lost. If the offender has no support system, they will gravitate to that which they know and is comfortable: their old friends and old circumstances. If they are fortunate to have a supportive family or community mentors but these individuals are not aware of what the offender has learned, what his/her triggers are, and what he/she needs to make it, then they will be unable to provide a helping hand.

I am convinced that this is correction's Achilles heel. The good news is that field of corrections has learned what is and is not effective while they are under our supervision. But, in my opinion, we have not learned how to apply informal social control by partnering with the community. There are exceptions to this rule. Red Wing is one of them. They have arguably one of the best aftercare or transitional programs around. They employ restorative techniques. They engage the community. They get it. They are still the exception.

For three years I served on the parole advisory committee which made recommendations to the Commissioner of Corrections regarding first-degree murder parole. I distinctly remember one case where the offender stated that he spent the first fifteen years in prison rejecting the counsel of the program staff. This counsel was that since he possessed anti-social attitudes and beliefs and that society values are contrary to his worldview, he should participate in programming that examined alternative beliefs. At the parole hearing, this inmate stated that he finally realized that his neighborhood was not like the rest of society. His neighborhood possessed a set of values that reinforced the ideas of looking out only for yourself, the need to defend honor even if it meant violence, that the strong can take from the weak. If he wanted to reach his dreams he had to confront his own set of beliefs and recognize that he has to surround himself with a different set of supports that hold a more compatible worldview. From the research on social learning, we have learned that social capital is critically important. We can't take social capital for granted and we have to help offenders build this capital up with people who will reinforce a normative culture that is pro-social in nature.

Healing Promise

The last part of the "heel of corrections" is the heal that is spelled h-e-a-l. It represents the most inspiring change I have seen in our field at least in the twenty-five years I've been involved. It all boils down to what Dan Van Ness says is the real purpose of the justice system. He says: "crime is a wound; justice should be about healing." The Healing Promise is that this concept called restorative justice, when applied correctly, can bring about healed relationships, greater balance, and even redemption.

There are now volumes written about restorative justice, its philosophical framework, and how it is being applied worldwide. There is an increased value placed on victim's input and needs. There is an obligation placed on the offender to make things right, to restore the balance, to the degree possible, before the crime occurred. But, I want to focus on the power of the community to express compassion, support and accountability.

In Dr. Sampson's work on collective efficacy, he stresses the need for the community to get involved. He looked at the most impoverished neighborhoods in Chicago and discovered that some

of these areas experienced significantly lower violent crime rates. When examined more closely, he found that these neighborhoods were different in that they had a greater emphasis on caring for each other. In other words, when neighbors found that someone needed food or assistance, they would offer it. When someone on the playground was bullying another child, they would step in and intervene even if it did not involve their own child. They elevated the standards and increased the expectation of what it meant to be a neighbor.

One of the earlier writers of restorative justice (Braithwaite) looked at crime rates worldwide and found that some societies had significantly lower rates. His explanation for this is that these societies "did not mind their own business." In other words, they got involved with each other and did not ignore behaviors that were destructive to interdependence and a sense of community living.

In a compelling article by Nils Christie's entitled "Conflict as Property" it describes conflict between individuals as personal property. Instead of handling conflict between the parties, it gets passed off to professionals who take over and address it through formal power structures (such as police, courts, etc.). He calls for a return to conflict being owned by those who are personally invested. When conflict is taken from them, they lose their skills and comfort in dealing with conflict and it is passed on to a group he calls professional thieves.

Restorative programs are now in place throughout North America, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Africa, and elsewhere that bring the victim and offender together to address the conflict caused by crime. In many areas, these programs allow those harmed in the community to participate in sentencing decisions through sentencing circles and family group conferencing and/or reparative boards. At one point, there were over 200 family members of homicide victims waiting to get into prisons in Texas to meet face

to face with the person who killed their loved one. There are sixty five citizen boards in Georgia that meet with offenders as they are being paroled to develop conditions of parole and to determine how to best support them. There are "circles of support" throughout Canada and southern MN that assist in the successful integration of sex offenders in the community. All across our nation and beyond our borders, community work service has evolved into "earned redemption" work where offenders contribute in a meaningful way to the community such as sandbagging, Habitat for Humanity, and providing trained dogs for the blind. The only limit is our imagination.

And, here is the best part. Not only do offenders gain the opportunity to earn their redemption so to speak, not only do they increase their bonding to the community, but, best of all, communities are strengthened by the very act of getting together to address crime problems. By gathering they discover that they share a common goal, to improve their neighborhood and give their children opportunities, and that there is a lot more work that has to be done. If they can help a victim or assist in an offender gaining some dignity and succeed, then what is to stop them from doing the next thing that needs to be done? Lydia could have used that.

We may never see correctional institutions as we would like. Thankfully, there are institutions such as Red Wing and Lookout Mountain that are implementing these techniques and cultures. We may never escape the public tendency to over emphasize individual characteristics and call for levels of punishment that research would indicate are counterproductive. But, if we do transcend these policy tendencies, it will be because our communities rise up and demand it. That is the promise of corrections and the promise of healing. If that existed in Lydia's neighborhood, there would have been someone to catch her before she fell too deep, someone to support her in her time of need."

It's Your Turn to Serve on the Board!

The past-president serves as chair of the nominating committee for SOM. Although elections do not take place until the annual business meeting in October, nominations may be made at any time. A list of current board members and officers, and their terms of office, may be found on SOM's website: www.sociologistsofminnesota.org.

Contact **Tim Pippert** today to nominate a colleague or yourself for a board position.

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Call for Organizers

The 2005 Sociologists of Minnesota Conference will be a success because of your support. Please offer now to is looking for innovative proposals to gather sociologists to discuss our work, share ideas, problem-solve, and see what's new. Come share your work in a variety of formats:

All areas of sociological focus and practice are welcome, however, sessions organized by and/or relating to topics of interest to students, as well as sessions pertaining to the conference theme, are particularly encouraged.

Submit your by **August 15, 2005**. Send all proposals to:

Joan Vitek Hiller
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5638 Glen Avenue Minnetonka, MN 55345
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☞ Christopher Uggen – 2004 Conference Honoree ☞

Public Criminologies and Sociological Education

"I thank the Sociologists of Minnesota for this award and my generous colleague Liz Boyle for nominating me. It is a tremendous honor to be recognized for contributions to sociological education, even if there are many who are more deserving. And, as a native Minnesotan with a juvenile arrest history, it holds special meaning to receive this honor at MCF-Red Wing.

At the 2004 American Sociological Association meeting and the 2003 Sociologists of Minnesota meeting, Michael Burawoy spoke on "public sociologies." Today I address "public criminologies." I am not certain whether I qualify as a public criminologist or sociologist, but just as many of my colleagues here today, I have straddled the lines of Burawoy's two-by-two table with one hand in public and professional sociology and one foot in policy and critical sociology. As a graduate student, I was struck by James Q. Wilson's (1975) observation that criminologists typically lack well-organized facts and theories that could respond to policy questions. As a former social worker, I also saw how policy was made in the absence of social science data and analysis. For better or worse, I have tried to bring better social science information to bear on issues of public concern and this approach has since guided my teaching, research, and service efforts.

I focus on four areas of public criminology: (1) rulemaking; (2) testing social interventions; (3) evaluating cultural images of the criminal; and, (4) assembling basic social facts. In each case, applying sociology to a question of public interest and then writing and talking about it may have contributed in a small way to sociological education.

Studying rulemaking and criminal code

Sociologists are well-suited to asking basic questions about the origins of law. Does a particular law emerge from a societal consensus against crime or from conflict between more and less powerful groups? It is a simple question, but one often left out of public debates. As part of Angela Behren's undergraduate thesis, we examined the origins of restrictive felon voting bans in the United States (Behrens, Uggen, and Manza 2003). We knew that these laws diluted the African American vote, so the basic social theory we applied was one of group threat (Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958). Our historical and quantitative analysis showed that the threat of new African American voters appears to have spurred passage of felon voting bans after 1870 when African American males gained the right to vote in many states. By scratching the surface of a taken-for-granted rule, we found that it arose from conflict. In some states at least, the laws were a response to the "menace of negro domination." A second implication is that the racial origins of the restrictions had been ignored in public debates about the laws. When I talk to students, journalists, or friends about this history, however, some of them see the laws from a different perspective.

Taking apart policy interventions

A second use for public criminology, which Michael Burawoy would classify as "policy" sociology, involves the effects of social interventions. How and why do such interventions matter? My work on how felon voting affects elections can be placed in this category, as well as policy analyses of how employment affects crime (Uggen 2000). With about 600,000 prisoners rejoining us each year, reducing their reoffense rates has become an issue of public concern. Why did the jobs programs of the 1970s fail to reduce crime? I applied some basic life-course sociology (Sampson and Laub 1993) to some old experimental data and found that work effects on crime depend on age. Even a lousy job opportunity

reduced recidivism among older, but not younger, offenders. The implication is that putting resources into reentry programming might improve public safety. Again, a simple sociological insight provided a useful guide.

Evaluating cultural images of the criminal

My favorite sort of public criminology involves critically evaluating the taken-for-granted assumptions or stylized "cultural images" of criminals. For example, the public stereotype of "hardened" criminals assume that criminality crystallizes at some point in life and becomes irreversible. Yet there is ample evidence to the contrary. A large percentage of people commit crime early in life but even the most serious offenders desist from crime eventually (e.g., Laub and Sampson 2003). My work with former graduate student Melissa Thompson (2003) also shows many short-term changes, with the process of *illegal* earnings determination looking a lot like the process of *legal* earnings determination. The amount that people earn is driven by their "criminal capital" and consumption patterns. This new image gets us thinking about how to promote "early retirement" for released offenders – inducing them to desist six months or a year before they otherwise would have desisted. Once we get past stereotypes and look at the data, it becomes clear that the world cannot be neatly divided into criminals and conformists and equally clear that most criminals need not be isolated forever.

Assembling social facts

Perhaps the most useful (if least sexy) aspect of public criminology is simply assembling social facts. I was reminded of this when a journalist dismissed my rambling discussion of theory and method by saying, "We just want the numbers, man." A few years ago I started trying to apply some basic demography to estimate the number of former felons and former prisoners in the U.S. population. I was interested in their voting patterns, but others wanted to apply the numbers to employment, family life, and other questions. The raw number – it turned out to be about 9 million former felons – seemed to interest many scholars and non-scholars. When Jeff Manza and I were looking for a way to conclude our felon voting book, we conducted a public opinion poll to see whether people supported laws that bar felons and ex-felons from voting. We found that about 80 percent of Americans favored restoring voting rights for former felons who had completed their sentences, but that only about 30 percent favored allowing current prisoners to vote. I am not sure that such polls contributed to sociological education for the public, but several legislators and aides told us how much they needed such basic social science information.

To summarize, public criminology and sociology can test, and sometimes challenge the taken-for-granted stylized "facts." This sometimes takes the form of myth busting: The history of disenfranchisement busts the myth that criminal sanctions are natural and universal. The work and crime study busts the myth that "nothing works" in reducing recidivism among so-called "hardened" criminals. The illegal earnings study busts the myth that crime is "senseless," as most crime is economic behavior and all crime is human behavior. Finally, the population estimates of ex-felons bust the myth that criminals cannot become citizens of good standing, for millions of former offenders live and work among us every day.

In closing, I thank the Sociologists of Minnesota for this important award and the terrific graduate and undergraduate students who have contributed to my own sociological education."

Monte Bute acceptance speech

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