

IN THE FIELD

CONTENTS

Reflections	1
Summer at ASA	2
Evolution...	3
Check Us Out!	5
Events/Deadlines	6
Crossfertilizations	8
New Student Bios	9

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Students, Faculty and Fellow Readers,
With this first issue of the GSSA and PSA newsletter, we hope to bring to you a small glimpse of the events, achievements and thoughts that compose our Sociology graduate program here at GMU. In this issue you will find an array of relevant information ranging from events and opportunities to personal stories of success that we hope you can derive valuable knowledge to apply to your own endeavors.

We strongly encourage other students, and faculty as well, to become involved in the opportunities that both the GSSA and PSA hope to offer. To learn more information about anything you see in this issue please visit the [GSSA website](#). If you would like to become involved with either the GSSA or PSA, or would like to contribute to the next issue in the spring, send us an [email](#). Enjoy the first issue and be on the lookout for the next one in the spring!

Ways to contribute

Reflections—Discuss a short experience you've had while being at Mason

Articles—Short pieces on anything from personal engagement with the field to politics

Book Reviews—Read a recent piece of scholarship that pushes our sociological thinking into a new realm? Share it with us!

Student Bios—Check out the members section of the website and feel free to email us your bio, cv, and photo

Individual News—Anything happen between newsletters? Ranging from the personal life to the academic, feel free to share

REFLECTIONS: BUILDING SOCIAL BONDS

By Jason Smith

There was a moment when I thought everything was going "just fine" in the GSSA's attempt at connecting outside of the classroom.

Some of us decided to participate in GMU's intramural soccer league in September. In shorts and shin guards, humbled to see each other on a *level playing field* (pun intended), we worked together to thwart the under-

grad teams who faced us. However, the "just fine" part came to a crashing halt upon our last game. I can only describe this event as "epic," and I do not use the word lightly because there was nothing *light* about it.

Facing towards the southern skies I saw the horde that was to be our rivals for the afternoon. Armored in tie-dye and smiles they seemed to pose no threat. I was wrong. Outnumbering us on the field they kicked

and pushed our heroic team (named *Social Forces*) to the brink of destruction. Yes, *destruction*. The final game had taken its toll, as members of our team faced serious injuries—of the fractured bone variety.

Yet goodness sprang from this event. The destruction that was meant to be our undoing had in fact made us more whole. Seems like we have more to talk about now than collective action. Hey, wait a minute...

NEWSLETTER STAFF

Jennifer Burns (co-editor)
Jason Smith (co-editor)
Abigail Reiter
Victoria Watson

ATTENDING ASA: HOW I SPENT (PART OF) MY SUMMER VACATION

By Randy Lynn

After three years of graduate school, I had yet to make a pilgrimage to the ASA's annual meeting. This seemed to me somewhat derelict, considering I anticipate going to these sorts of events for the rest of my life. And let's face it, on the spectrum of rites of passage—from ceremonial mumblings to sticking your hand in a hornet's nest—going to a huge conference about stuff you like is pretty tame.

So I packed a bag—which included a paper I'd written for Dr. Best in the fall, promised myself I'd revise, and hadn't touched since December—and waited out a three hour delay in Baltimore, finally making my inauspicious entrance in the lobby of the Atlanta Hilton at two in the morning.

I presented on the morning of the second day, and it was much less imposing than I'd imagined. I had a small but lively roundtable who offered thoughtful comments. The brief roller coaster of cramming and presenting ended up being much less central to my experience than I had anticipated.

Far more salient were the litany of sessions and presentations, the steady diet of saran-wrapped sandwiches and coffee, and my entertaining adventures among the rocky shoals of networking. Here are some tips I picked up during my southern sojourn:

1) The ASA Student Forum had good free food and my sources informed me between mouthfuls that this is typical.

2) If the conference is hosted by two adjoining hotels, check out both hotels' food options. This might sound obvious, but discovering a much more reasonably priced coffee shop in the other hotel at 10 PM the night before I left wasn't my finest hour.

3) There are so many presentations that there's really no reason ever to be bored. Sometimes I stayed for the whole session; other times I visited two or three sessions during a time slot. But I enjoyed the conference much more once I got over my hesitation at ducking out of a session between papers and made sure I was always somewhere I wanted to be.

4) Memorize this mad lib: "You mentioned *obscure detail* which made me think of *trendy esoteric author* who argues *unnecessarily long summary*. I was wondering if you considered *tenuous connection*, and if so, *pretentious conclusion*." Apparently this is the standard formula for asking a question. I'm not a fan myself, but it's good to anticipate when you're presenting.

5) You can't hide from networking. I learned this skulking back from dinner on the first night, when I bumped into Dr. Witte: "I'm on my way to the CITASA reception," he exclaimed. "And where are you going?" Apparently "washing my hair" isn't an acceptable excuse for missing a reception. Not only was I standing awkwardly in a bar within ten minutes, I was also treated to a lecture from Dr. Witte about how networking is the most important thing in the world.

6) Moments of awkwardness and agonizing small talk aside, networking does have its benefits. At the CITASA reception, I met and spoke briefly with danah boyd, one of my academic crushes—though I'm not sure anything I said was remotely intelligent. And the next evening, at a reception with Dr. Best and Dr. Bockman, I met an Oxford professor affiliated with a summer doctoral program I'm eyeing for next year. So my time sipping free drinks among smart people was hardly wasted.

Overall, I really enjoyed my time amidst the smorgasbord of sessions and sociologists. Next year's annual conference will be August 13-16 in Chicago. Hopefully many of you will be able to attend, present, and enjoy yourselves as I did this year.



“My time sipping free drinks among smart people was hardly wasted.”

MY EVOLUTION AS A SOCIOLOGIST

By Beth Degi

During Classical Sociological Theory, Dr. Scimecca was explaining Comte and causally commented to the class, “You’ve all had a ton of Sociology in undergrad, so you get where I’m going with this.”

Intending to be funny, I dramatically scooted down in my chair and loudly cleared my throat. As the other students laughed and Dr. Scimecca raised his eyebrows, I began to think I was nuts for jumping head first into the Sociology Masters program with no formal academic background. I didn’t come here in the most orthodox manner, but looking at the steps that got me here I can see a clear evolution towards my becoming a public sociologist.

My undergraduate studies in Print Journalism and Women, Policy and Political Leadership gave me the pragmatic training and rich background in feminist advocacy to make an impact with a non-profit focused on women’s issues...only I didn’t pursue that path. Terrified by the amount of student loans hanging over my head, I leaped on the opportunity to take a lucrative job in advertising following my undergraduate studies. I justified the move to myself by promising that this would be a stepping stone into

work that truly interested me. I told myself that I would parlay the “do-or-die” sales skills I learned into some form of issue advocacy on behalf of impoverished women. I decided I would network and volunteer with women’s organizations as I paid back my loans by “working for the man.”

While I was with some of the leading communications companies in the country I served on community boards, volunteered at a women’s shelter, and made a general fuss whenever my employer wanted to create an ad that portrayed women in demeaning ways—something that happens with shocking frequency in the advertising world. I became known as a do-gooder among my coworkers, but the truth was without the extracurricular advocacy work I was doing I would have withered up emotionally. Activism was the only thing that scratched my idealist itch and without it I felt unfulfilled and outraged at the state of affairs within the marketing world that insisted that exploiting women, both in print and in the workplace, was the only way to successfully run a company.

The glitz (and extremely cushy salary) of the advertising world was intoxicating, and I firmly believe that I would have

ended up staying for several more years despite the promise I made to myself to move into advocacy full time once my student debt was more manageable. The constant happy hours, free goodies from businesses trying to gain editorial favor, and flattery from clients would have carried me away in a wave of graft had personal crisis not hit three years into my adventure in marketing.

When I graduated college I was extremely overweight—classified by my doctor as both borderline diabetic and morbidly obese. I had always been a fan of food, but the alarming extra pounds were packed on following my being date-raped in high school by my first boyfriend. I was a product of Ohio’s Abstinence-Only Education, and had entered the relationship with a dangerously limited understanding of sex and navigating sexual consent. My naivety left me vulnerable to both the assault and the miserable aftermath I endured from my peers. Being from a conservative, Christian, Midwestern town I had gotten the very clear message from my church and even my public



MY EVOLUTION AS A SOCIOLOGIST (CON'T)

“It was time to do what I had set out to do in the first place— use my skills to speak on behalf of women that didn’t have the opportunity to do so for themselves.”

school that if I did not ‘save’ myself for marriage I was going to Hell. Riding out the shock, shame and confusion that accompany sexual assault in this environment left me convinced that I was a horrible person and that, furthermore, my female body was a liability. Eating punishing amounts of food conveniently addressed both of these problems by allowing me to validate my feelings of worthless as I was taunted for my weight while disfiguring my body to the point that few men would be interested in making passes that would further confuse and terrify me.

I carried my eating disorder and obesity into my advertising career, where I met a coworker that pulled me into a support group. Eighteen months later I had shed 104 pounds, and had absolutely no idea how to handle the male attention I was receiving. All of the feelings of violation, vulnerably, shame, and fear I had pressed down with food following the rape surged to the surface. Pain I had denied flooded through me and for the first time I found the courage to face it. Through the support of my friends and a therapist, I faced what had happened to me - both the actual assault and the damage that

my peers’ reaction had caused and I began to heal. After a few days leave I returned to my job, sat down in front of my expensive Mac computer in my fancy K Street office and stared at the screen of emails from clients concerned about selling luxury face creams and Jimmy Choo shoes it dawned on me that I couldn’t care less.

At that moment something clicked deep inside of me and I realized that so much of what had driven my interest in advocating to improve the lives of disadvantaged women had been the need to address the pain and shame I had repressed. My advertising career was over. It was time to do what I had set out to do in the first place - use my communication skills and powerful voice to speak on behalf of women that didn’t have the means or opportunity to do so for themselves.

This led me to pursue my MA in Sociology at GMU. I transitioned from the advertising world into advocacy in late 2008, leaving a glossy magazine (and nice paycheck) to contract for a small women’s non-profit. As more contract offers came I realized that rather than working as an employee for just one women’s group, I could consult for several

and in so doing focus solely on work that utilized my best skills. I incorporated my own consulting firm, Mount Degi & Associates, and over the next two years consulted for several advocacy organizations and helped found a non-profit for gender-specific service providers.. Although I was proud of the work I was doing, my fiancée pointed out that if I wanted to make a major impact on the status of women I was going to have to gain a deeper understanding of the root causes responsible for the oppression ensnaring women in cycles of violence, poverty, and discrimination. GMU’s Sociology MA program allows me to continue my evolution as a public sociologist. I plan to mesh my communication skills with this academic experience in order to influence individuals and institutions to take action to eradicate violence towards women.

STUDENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD CHECK US OUT!

PUBLICATIONS

James D. Unnever, Francis T. Cullen, Scott A. Mathers, Timothy E. McClure, and **Marisa C. Allison**. 2009. "Racial Discrimination and Hirschi's Criminological Classic: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge." *Justice Quarterly*, 26(3).

Nancy Shields, Carlie Fieseler, Cassie Gross, Meredith Hilburg, Nick Koechig, **Randy Lynn**, and Brandi Williams. 2010. "Comparing the Effects of Victimization, Witnessed Violence, Hearing about Violence, and Violent Behavior on Young Adults." *Journal of Applied Social Science*, 4(1).

Miller, Robert K., JR, Stephen J. McNamee and **Abigail B. Reiter**. 2009. "Inheritance." *Encyclopedia of Death and the Human Experience*. Edited by C.D. Bryant and D.L. Peck. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Lipari, Rachel, Anna Winters, Kenneth Matos, **Jason Smith**, and Lindsay Rock. "Military Child Well-Being in the Face of Multiple Deployments." *Handbook of War and Society*, edited by S. Carlton-Ford and M.G. Ender. New York, NY: Routledge.

PRESENTATIONS

Randy Lynn presented the paper "Constructing Parenthood in Moral Panics of Youth, Digital Media, and 'Sexting'" at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in Atlanta, GA. Randy also presented a paper, with James Witte, entitled "Learning to Like Facebook? Social Categories, Social Network Site Selection, and Social Network Site Uses" at the joint annual meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society and North Central Sociological Association in Chicago, IL.

Sara Moore presented the paper "Constructing and Contesting Authoritative Knowledge: Midwifery and the Struggle for Legitimacy" as well as the paper, with Andrea Robles, "Conducting Collaborative Research in Challenging Economic Times" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society in Cambridge, MA.

Abby Reiter presented a paper, with Elizabeth Reiter, entitled "How Formal and Informal Emergency Work Policies Perpetuate Inequality and Susceptibility to Further Crises in the Home and at Work Among Vulnerable Populations" at the annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society in Atlanta, GA.

Vicki Watson was the guest speaker for the George Mason University Sociology and Anthropology 2010 Honor Society Reception.

AWARDS

Marisa Allison was a co-recipient of the Donal A.J. MacNamara Award for Outstanding Publication from the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

Beth Degi was the recipient of the Edith Clark Nalls Scholarship from the Zonta Club of Fairfax

Randy Lynn was the 2010 Recipient of the Irene B. Taeuber Graduate Student Paper Award from the District of Columbia Sociological Society

STUDENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD (CON'T) CHECK US OUT!

OTHER WORKS

Marisa Allison recently launched a brownbag community for graduate student women sponsored by the Women's Center called "Beyond the Classroom: Women's Grad School Survival Hour" which beings meeting this semester.

Abbey Reiter has been involved with Tenants and Workers United, based out of Alexandria, as both a researcher and liaison since January of 2010.

Jason Smith had the opportunity this summer to act as one of the judges for the "Frank Capra Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Film Criticism," awarded by the journal *Film International*.

Perry Threfall has accepted a position as an adjunct professor at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA and at Northern Virginia Community College. She is teaching courses in Sociological Theory, Public Sociology, and Introductory Sociology.

UPCOMING EVENTS/DEADLINES

GSSA/PSA EVENTS

- Nov.12 "Promise and Problems of Engaging Publics." Panel of differing views on the concept of a *Public Sociology*. See our ad on the next page for details!!
- Nov.29 Brownbag table with Nicole McCoy, discussing her dissertation research and passing the PhD comps. 3:00-4:30, SOAN Conference room.

MASON EVENTS

- Nov.3 Eden King (Psychology, GMU), "Diversity at Work: Understanding and Improving the Experiences of Stigmatized Workers." Johnson Center Rm.F, 6:00. Sponsored by Women and Gender Studies.
- Nov.8 Bill Schneider (Public Policy, GMU), "Dirty Little Secrets of American Politics." Center for the Arts, 7:00. Vision Series. [Tickets Needed](#) (free).
- Nov.9 Robert Crews (History, Stanford), "Cosmopolitanism and Religious Politics in Afghanistan." Mason Hall, Meese Conference Rm, 3:00-4:30. Sponsored by Center for Global Islamic Studies
- Nov.13 "Lost & Found: African Americans in Northern Virginia." Mason Hall, Meese Conference Rm, 10:00-3:00. Sponsored by African American Studies Program.

CONFERENCE DEADLINES

- Nov.15 [Rutgers University](#). "Multiple Childhoods/Multidisciplinary Perspectives: Interrogation Normativity in Childhood Studies." Camden, NJ. May 20-21, 2011.
- Dec.1 [International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry](#). "Qualitative Inquiry and the Politics of Advocacy." University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Champaign, IL. May 17-21, 2011.
- Dec.15 [North Central Sociological Association](#). "Pragmatism in Research and Education." Cleveland, OH. Mar.31-Apr.2, 2011.
- Dec.30 [Howard University](#). "Human Rights in Global Perspective." Washington, DC. Sept.30-Oct.1, 2011.
- Jan.13 [American Sociological Association](#) (the big one!!). "Social Conflict: Multiple Dimensions and Arenas." Chicago, IL. Aug.13-16, 2011.

The Promise and Problems of Engaging Publics

Friday, November 12
Johnson Center, Third Floor
Room A
3:00-5:00 pm

Mathieu Deflem is the editor of the book *Sociologists in a Global Age* (2007), documenting sociologists with an international focus and their experiences practicing sociology in a globalized world.

Leslie Hossfeld served as the co-chair on the ASA Task Force for Institutionalizing Public Sociology. She is also the co-founder of the Southeastern North Carolina Food Systems Project and a co-editor of the forthcoming book, *Public Sociology: Research, Action, and Change* (2011).

Phil Nyden is a co-editor of the forthcoming book, *Public Sociology: Research, Action, and Change* (2011). He is currently engaging in research which explores linking grassroots activities to global networks in order to share local research and policy activities.

Sponsored by the
Graduate Student Sociological Association
and the
Public Sociology Association

Sponsored by the Student Organization Student Funding Board



PANELISTS

Mathieu Deflem

University of South Carolina

Leslie Hossfeld

University of North Carolina-
Wilmington

Phil Nyden

Loyola University Chicago

MODERATOR

John Dale

George Mason University



CROSSFERTILIZATION: SUPER SAD TRUE LOVE STORY



By Jeff Johnson

If George Orwell wrote *1984* imagining an inevitable socialist dystopia, then Gary Shteyngart has matched his satirical wit and vision at the other end of the socio-economic spectrum.

Super Sad True Love Story is set against the backdrop of a free market dystopia during an unspecified future year when American society is crumbling. Almost everything is privatized, nothing is produced, the dollar is devoid of meaningful value, and only the promise of good credit limps the country along.

The novel tells the story of Lenny Abramov, B.A., M.B.A. Balding and thirty-nine, Lenny feels his life slipping away, though he and his boss Joshie Goldmann are working on immortality for the Wapachung Corporation in New York City, where they make large incomes selling to wealthy clients, “high net worth individuals.” We follow Lenny as he meets and falls in love with Eunice Park, a young and beautiful California girl whose parents emigrated from Korea. As we follow their unlikely love story through unfunded public parks that serve as concentration camps for “low net worth individuals” and corporate lobbies that are protected by a privatized National Guard, sociologies of almost everything pop the narrative off the pages and illuminate the trajectory of contemporary social conditions into a frighteningly near future.

What types of individuals are possible in this society? To literally survive, you must become a “high net worth individual.” We get a taste of these types through Lenny’s friends. Self-obsessed and extremely image conscious, they meet up at night to stare into their apparati. Imagine futuristic smart phones streaming holographic ratings of your wealth, personality, and attractiveness, measured against everyone around you. What does consumption look like? Like it might at the most advanced stages of free market capitalism, hyper-prosumption. People do all the work themselves on their own personal aparata. They even stream themselves through their aparata like their own reality show, paid to say the names of corporate brands as they buy from those corporations.

This is somewhat bleak, but we do get glimpses of hope through sociologies of intimacy and family life. While self-interest initially motivates Eunice’s acceptance of Lenny’s advances, we soon learn that she is concerned about her sister and parents, her struggling family, even as she maxes out the family credit card at AssLuxury.com. While nobody in America reads printed media artifacts, Eunice learns that Lenny actually READS books, loves his family, and cares about substance and content, even as he pushes an empty product. She starts to feel that Lenny, like OMG, actually cares about her, and Eunice slowly falls in love with him. As the final strings of the social fabric snap around them, though, their worries for their lives and families are unable to sustain their love. Simply put, the social structure of the surrounding free market dystopia cannot nourish integrity, love, warmth, or compassion.

Sociologists, those with humanist interests or those who want a glimpse of the treatment of American publics in a completed free market society, should especially pay attention to the “American Restoration Authority Harm Reduction Program” as it targets public parks and housing projects. And especially pay attention to the climatic scene of the art show hosted by Joshie. There we find depictions of the grisly and inevitable conclusions of love and American publics at the zenith of a free market society.

Hopefully these conclusions never come to be. Though its hard to imagine “Super Sad True Love Story” becoming a household word like “1984,” Shteyngart has accomplished something literary that should have a wide impact on many disciplines and fields, including sociology, forcing us to clarify what we are doing and where we are going.

Crossfertilizations is a series of blog posts examining the intersections of sociology and other disciplines or cultural objects. Contributions to the series is highly encouraged and allows us to make connections between the theories that we read and the everyday experiences we encounter. If something you read or have seen is radiating with the sociological then by all means contribute to this ongoing blog series. Shoot us an [email](#) with “Crossfertilizations” in the subject line.

WELCOME NEW STUDENTS

New Master Students

Jen Burns: Jen graduated from Elon University with a B.A. in Sociology and Anthropology. Originally from Eden, North Carolina her academic interests include gender issues, criminology and environmentalism.

Beth Degi: Beth's academic focus is on gendered violence and conflict. Her research interests include exploring the ways women and men are socialized to view rape and sexual assault. Her hobbies include the GMU swim club and spending time with her dog and fiancée Will.

Ely Dick: Ely graduated from Roanoke College in 2010 with a B.A. in Spanish and Sociology. His interests include cultural studies and poverty (both domestic and international). *"My great passion in life is volunteering, especially at homeless shelters or anywhere in Central America."*

JP Escano: JP graduated from James Madison University with a B.A. in Sociology and French. His interests include a concentration on race and ethnicity, with aspirations to work for a federal agency. JP also enjoys exercise, athletics, football, guitar and meeting new people.

Melissa Schlobohm: Melissa graduated from SUNY Purchase with a B.A. in Sociology. Originally from a small, rural town in the catskill mountains of NY, Melissa hopes to specialize in conflict resolution and/or environmental sociology. *"I enjoy hiking, kayaking, going to thrift stores, traveling, and spending time with friends!"*

McKayla Theisen: McKayla graduated from the University of Minnesota with a B.A. in Psychology and Sociology. Originally from Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, McKayla plans on specializing in law, crime, and deviancy. *"I love reading books about crime and criminal deviants."*

New PhD Students

Marisa Allison: Marisa received her B.A. at Judson College in psychology and criminal justice. Originally from Huntsville, AL she received her M.A. at the University of Alabama in Criminal Justice. She began her Ph.D. in Sociology at Mississippi State University and is now completing this degree at GMU. Marisa has been involved in the graduate certificate program in Women and Gender Studies here at Mason this past year. Her research interests include gender inequality in U.S. colleges and universities and the feminization of higher education.

Alex Boklin: Alex graduated from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow with a specialization in sociology. Alex's other passions encompass a large array of musical interests including experience playing the drums. *"Now what preoccupies me is a phenomenon of magic, and this is another field where various disciplines intersect with each other (just what I love)."*

Katie Kerstetter: Before coming to George Mason, Katie spent three years working as a Policy Analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, where her research and advocacy helped to improve the District's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. In 2009, in collaboration with a community-based organization, she published "Voices for Change: Perspectives on Strengthening Welfare-to-Work from DC TANF Recipients" that led to the inclusion of welfare recipients' perspectives in policy discussions. She holds a Masters in Public Policy from the University of Maryland. Her research interests include poverty, inequality, race, and helping communities and the organizations that serve them identify and address their needs.

Linda Lavender: Linda received her B.A. from Bates College in 1987 in American History and received her MA in Conflict Transformation (concentration in Peace building and International Development) from Eastern Mennonite University in 2009. Linda's area of interest is in globalization focusing on resource conflicts governance and corruption. Linda is married with three children and works for GMU in the School of Management as a Program Manager for Executive Programs. *"I strongly believe shedding light on the externalities created by unfettered markets in the global south is an important missing component in effecting social justice."*