

# IN THE FIELD

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## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

This is the first time we've had a second issue of a newsletter during the course of the academic year. The beauty of having a newsletter once per semester is to keep you updated on current projects and efforts by the GSSA and PSA. Additionally, more academic related news (such as conference and award deadlines) can be made available.

The PSA is kicking into full throttle this semester, with publicly minded projects in the works and the establishment of a new [website](#)—which we hope you will visit often, with new

content posted weekly. If you are interested in getting involved in the PSA or the GSSA please contact us ([gmusocgrads@gmail.com](mailto:gmusocgrads@gmail.com)).

In this issue we have a guest post from John Robinson (Northwestern), who offers us a reflection on the value of attending last fall semester's Public Sociology Graduate Conference. As always there is a listing of work that our graduate students have completed since last September, and a variety of opportunities for students to look into.

### 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

### CSSR Spring 2012 Brownbags

Robinson Hall A Rm.103

April 12 Gerald Fitzgerald, Political Science PhD Student Dept of Public and International Affairs "**Divergent Trajectories: The European State and its Ethno-Religious minorities**"

April 19 Sahar Haghighat, Sociology PhD Student Dept of Sociology and Anthropology "**Compulsory Embodiment of Nation: Tehranian Women Contesting the Nation Through a Slight Slip of Their Dress**"

April 26 Josh Tuttle, Sociology PhD Student Dept of Sociology and Anthropology "**Catholic Projects: The Articulation of Racial Identity within American Catholicism**"

May 3 Members from SOAN 833 and clients and staff from Bread for the City "**Unpacking Collaboration: A Participatory Research project with GMU and Bread for the City, Inc**"

*We highly encourage all faculty, staff, and students to attend. The brownbags are a great way to see what your fellow peers are working on and to engage with them as they go through the research process.*

## ACADEMIA OR POLICY?



**By John N. Robinson III**  
**Northwestern University**

Nothing better illustrates the usefulness of public sociology as a venue for civic engagement than to reflect on the awkward relationship that exists between sociology and policy. On the one hand, they seem superficially adjacent, as if sibling disciplines. For example, it is not uncommon for a sociologist to profess the “policy-relevance” of his or her own work. In fact, “policy-relevance” is generally the most basic and intuitive way to imagine our work as important at all. Likewise, subfields such as the study of the welfare state or urban poverty treat policy as a central object of analysis, thereby further blurring disciplinary boundaries that already seem porous and vaguely defined.

However, scholars who overstep rather than merely straddle the line between sociology and policy find that the distance between the two is deceptively vast. My coauthor (Katie Kerstetter) and I learned this lesson in vivid detail as we set out to prepare for George Mason University’s Public Sociology Graduate Conference last fall semester a presentation based on a policy paper that we would soon submit to an edited collection entitled, *Agenda for Social Justice*. Trained as a sociologist, the conventions of policy paper writing initially had me feverishly scratching my head. Just imagine my bewilderment in being told to limit our contribution to 10 pages or less, to refrain from citing the source of every assertion we made, and (my favorite) to “minimize the jargon.” Trained in the public policy world, Katie felt more comfortable excising jargon and developing arguments via bullet points but experienced a similar sense of bewilderment when it came time to add “Theory” to our policy argument.

While the conventions of policy paper writing took some getting used to, our greatest challenge still lay before us:

transforming such a paper into a presentation of interest to an academic audience. This is not to say that we were ultimately successful in doing so but in either case I can report some insights.

- First, academic and policy outlets seem to be interested in different aspects of the problems we study. This is how a policy paper about limited equity cooperatives as an underutilized policy instrument became an academic presentation about limited equity cooperatives as an example of organizational nonconformity. Both are important potential contributions but the former tries to fill a practical gap and the latter a conceptual one. But situating such a project in an academic literature, as we must do if we intend to publish in academic outlets, threatens to abstract the discussion from the more pragmatic concerns of the policy world.
- This leads into a second insight: the answers we as academics give to theoretical puzzles tend to raise still more questions, while the answers we give to policy questions are expected to settle them. For example, in our policy paper we explicitly advocate in favor of one policy instrument over another, a move less likely to win success in purely academic outlets. Naturally, some of the toughest questions we received when fielding questions concerned the challenge of conveying to our audience a sense of balance in our consideration of various policy instruments.
- Finally, we found that it was helpful to actually inform our audience beforehand that our project was one of translating between academic and policy worlds, thereby inviting them to participate in this messy process. We decided to do this as a strategy of making our presentation more intelligible, but the results exceeded our greatest expectations, as the audience asked great questions and took seriously the challenge of producing knowledge of interest to academic and policy audiences.

## ACADEMIA OR POLICY (CON'T)

Unfortunately, such opportunities for fruitful dialogue appear to be rare. Most often, it seems that scholars have to choose: academia or policy? This is why venues like GMU's burgeoning public sociology graduate conferences are so invaluable. It is true that the process of developing our presentation became for us an occasion to reflect on how the policy and academia worlds seemed so starkly dissimilar. The presentation itself, however—and our engagement with co-presenters and the audience afterward—reminded us of what can happen when so many brilliant minds are brought together toward a worthy cause. When a conference can do this it creates borderlands, full of productive exchange, where once there were only boundaries. For these reasons, I would like to sincerely thank the organizers of GMU's public sociology conference for a job very well done.

*John N Robinson is an alumnus of the Sociology graduate program at GMU, receiving his MA in 2010 and then accepting enrollment in the Sociology PhD program at Northwestern University. His research interests gravitate around the areas of urban sociology, law, and social policy. In his current project he studies tenant legal campaigns against public housing demolition and redevelopment in the wake of the HOPE VI policy in particular and welfare state decline more generally.*

### GET INVOLVED!

**Two student groups are affiliated with the graduate program here at GMU. If you are looking for ways to get more involved in the department, your studies, or cohort, check out the info below...**

#### PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY ASSOCIATION



**WEBSITE**



**FACEBOOK GROUP**



**TWITTER**

#### GRADUATE STUDENT SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



**WEBSITE**



**FACEBOOK GROUP**

## STUDENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD CHECK US OUT!

### PUBLICATIONS

**Beth Degi.** 2011. "Take a Walk on the Slutty Side: A sociological take on 'SlutWalk'." *Unrest Magazine*, Issue 5 (Nov).

**Sara B. Moore.** 2011. "Reclaiming the Body, Birthing at Home: Knowledge, Power, and Control in Childbirth." *Humanity & Society*, 35(4).

**Abigail B. Reiter** and Shannon Davis. 2012. "Factors Influencing Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs about Student Achievement: Evaluation of a Pre-Service Teacher Diversity Awareness Program." *Multicultural Education*, 18(3).

C.W. Anderson, Tom Glaisyer, **Jason Smith**, and Marika Rothfeld. 2011. *Shaping 21st Century Journalism: Leveraging a "Teaching Hospital Model" in Journalism Education*. Policy Paper. Washington, DC: New America Foundation.

Shannon N.Davis and **Perry Ann Threlfall.** 2011. "Culture, Context, or Religion: What Really Gets Single Mothers Down the Aisle." *Sociological Focus*, 44(3).

**Victoria J. Watson**, Gregory Guagnano, and Shannon N. Davis. 2011. "Understanding HIV Stigma among University Students: Judgment, Blame and Interpersonal Avoidance." *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 49(1).

### PRESENTATIONS (Easterns Overload!!)

**Marisa Allison** presented "Mitigating Hierarchies in Social Research: Graduate Student Strategies" and "Media Rhetoric on the Feminization of Higher Education: The Paradox of Neoliberalism in the Academy" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Olivia Blackmon** presented a paper with Ruth Jackson (GMU) entitled "Tracking and Understanding Your Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Alex Boklin** presented "Stories of magic: making it 'work' together" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Robert Fenton** presented "Mediation and Mobility of the Meal: Intersecting Trajectories of People and Products in (Sub)Urban Tokyo" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Shannon Jacobsen** presented "Gendered Perceptions of Safety and Danger on the College Campus: The Functions of Fear" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Jeff Johnson** presented "Families in Social Movements: How to fit two disparate fields together" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society .

**Naliyah Kaya** presented "Poetic Personas: Self & Society in Spoken Word Performance Culture" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

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

### PRESENTATIONS (Con't)

**Katie Kerstetter** presented "Constructing the Frame: Social Location in a Cultural Documentation Project" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Randy Lynn** presented "What Are We Blocking? Guardian Intervention Strategies and Online Safety Among Youths" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Sara Moore** presented "Liminal Bodies and Shrinking Spaces: How the Meaning of Motherhood Takes Shape during Pregnancy and Childbirth" and "The Role of Reciprocity in Social Research" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Abby Reiter** presented papers with Elizabeth Reiter (Utah State) entitled "Reflections on Teaching Sociology: How Region, Class, Religion, and other Factors Affect What it Means, How its Done, and How it Feels" and "An Exploration of the Link between Violence and Health Problems among Minority Racial Groups: Using Ethnographic Research to Tell the Story behind the Numbers" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Aubin Richards** presented "Places of Play" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Randy Salm** presented "Socialization and Identity of Vulnerable Children in Colombia" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Jason Smith** presented "Between Colorblind and Colorconscious: Shifting Racial Ideologies in Contemporary Hollywood Films" and "Journalism Education and the Importance of Interdisciplinary Cross-Fertilization: Fostering a Public Sociology" at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Sociological Association. Jason also presented a paper with Sarah Stonbely (NYU) entitled, "Media Diversity and the FCC: A Social History and Institutional Considerations" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Josh Tuttle** presented "The Effect of Globalization on Religious Social Movements and Identities" at the annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society.

**Sprinceana Vitalie** presented "Sacred, secular, globalization: Moldova's Orthodox Church and the state" and "The USSR that wasn't lost: Soviet food among Soviet immigrants in the USA" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

### AWARDS HONORS AND ACCOLADES

**Naliyah Kaya** was awarded a travel grant from the Eastern Sociological Society to present at the society's annual meeting in February.

**Sara Moore** successfully advanced to full candidacy this past December. (YAY!!!)

**Jason Smith** was asked to serve as a fellow for the 2011-12 Campus Impact Forum at GMU. Hosted by the Office of International Programs and Services, the forum brings together students from across the university to brainstorm on issues related to diversity and interaction on the GMU campus.

## STUDENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD (CON'T)

### CHECK US OUT!

#### OTHER WORKS

**Olivia Blackmon** organized a panel entitled “Examining the Minority Study Abroad Experience” at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Naliyah Kaya** was a panelist for “Multi-Racial and Multi-Ethnic Identity: A Panel Discussion” *during Native American Heritage Month, hosted by the Office of Diversity Programs and Services at GMU.*

**Katie Kerstetter** helped organize and presented a paper at GSSA's first Public Sociology Graduate Conference.

**Sara Moore** and **Marisa Alison** organized a paper session entitled “Feminist Research Ethics” at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society. Sara also wrote a proposal to conduct a community needs assessment for the Richmond Promise Neighborhood Collaborative and is now managing the project for CSSR.

**Jason Smith** organized a panel with John N. Robinson III (Northwestern) entitled “Micro-to-Macro Bridges in Race Research” at the annual meeting of the Association for Humanist Sociology. Jason also organized a roundtable entitled “Toward a Media Sociology?” at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

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## UPCOMING EVENTS/DEADLINES

#### CONFERENCE DEADLINES

April 30 [Qualitative Report Annual Conference](#). “Qualitative Research and Technology.” Ft. Lauderdale, FL January 11-12, 2013.

July 15 [Association for Humanist Sociology](#). “When Race and Class Still Matter.” Knoxville, TN November 7-11, 2012.

Sept 1 [Mid-South Sociological Association](#). “Sociology from the South.” Mobile, AL November 7-10, 2012. (Extended deadline)

#### COMPETITIONS

May 30 [Frank Lindenfeld Outstanding Student Paper Award](#), Association for Humanist Sociology.

## JOURNAL SPOTLIGHT AND ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

### Journal Spotlight

[Intersections: Women's and Gender Studies in Review across Disciplines](#) is an interdisciplinary graduate student publication committed to promoting the interdisciplinary research of women's and gender issues. The publication is sponsored by the Center for Women's Studies (CWGS) and the English Department at the University of Texas at Austin, and seeks to share ownership of the journal and to further develop a vital exchange of ideas and texts. The journal thus takes place as part of the work of CWGS to build community among graduate students and to enable us to educate each other about the perspectives of our diverse fields.

Students are invited to submit their work or to volunteer their knowledge by serving as ad-hoc reviewers for special themed issues. Those interested should contact the editorial staff at [intersections.journal@gmail.com](mailto:intersections.journal@gmail.com)

[International Journal of Qualitative Methods](#) is seeking reviewers for their journal. If interested email your CV and areas of expertise to [ijqm@ualberta.ca](mailto:ijqm@ualberta.ca)

[Qualitative Sociology](#). An upcoming special issue aims to discuss Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in relation to sociological ethnographic and qualitative methodologies. ANT's call to 'follow actors,' its principle of symmetry, and its skepticism toward taken-for-granted categories in some way harkens to revered sociological traditions of ethnography, but at the same time challenges some of our existing conceptualizations and traditions of ethnographic research. This special issue brings together cutting-edge empirical articles that deploy/expand and dialogue with ANT's 'sociology of associations' in various arenas of the social world. Submissions are due by **August 31, 2012**.

[Sociation Today](#) is putting together a special issue dedicated to student research for their Fall / Winter 2012 issue. The official peer-review journal for the North Carolina Sociological Association, *Sociation Today* is a general sociology journal. Papers should be original, unpublished manuscripts of about 5,000 words in length, excluding footnotes and references. Articles should be accessible to professionals, students, and the general population. Submissions be sent by email no later than **May 31, 2012** to the guest editor, Cameron Lippard, at [lippardcd@appstate.edu](mailto:lippardcd@appstate.edu)

[Societies](#) will be publishing a special issue on the theme: "Embodied Action, Embodied Theory: Understanding the Body in Society." This special issue focuses on the interconnectedness of the body and society, thus it will include works that explore how the body is shaped by and constrained through socio-cultural processes, as well as those that focus on how bodies in action affect the societies in which they operate. Particularly interested in papers that explore the connections between the lived body and the body as a set of social experiences, insights into the body as a site of social control, and examinations of the body as a vehicle for the expression and consumption of culture. Submission are due **August 31, 2012**.