

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE NEWSLETTER

Prepared for the American Sociological Association

Section on Sociological Practice

Winter 2006

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Medical Errors: Sociological Research Makes News

Sociologist Ross Koppel's article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* on March 9, 2005 on the *Role of Computerized Physician Order Entry (CPOE) Systems in Facilitating Medication Errors* has become a major event in the medical literature.

Medication error kills or injures about 770,000 Americans annually in hospitals (and many times that not in hospitals). Previous research had focused almost entirely on the advantages of CPOE, calling it the panacea for medication prescribing errors.

Information Technology (I.T.) vendors attacked Koppel and his research team's methods, sample and interpretation. But experts in medical informatics called it a breakthrough work and seminal research, as did thousands of physicians and nurses who work in hospitals. The article has been cited in the medical literature over 20,000 times since its publication last year, and there are several list-serves dedicated to it.

August's issue of the *Journal of Biomedical Informatics* devoted a special section to several articles by and about Koppel et al.'s work on CPOE and medication errors. The issue featured the leading writers in the field. The *Journal of Critical Care* invited Koppel to write the commentary for their issue: *What Do We Know About Medication Errors Made Via a CPOE System Vs. Those Made Via Hand-Written Orders?* Koppel and colleagues will give several presentations at this year's Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) meetings on patient safety and I.T.

The research involved intensive one-on-one interviews, shadowing of clinicians, shadowing of pharmacists, floor observations, expert interviews, focus groups, as well as a survey of 90% of the residents and house-staff.

Koppel was the principal investigator in this study of *The Role of Hospital Workplace Culture and Medication Errors*. He is a Professor at the Center for Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, School of Medicine; Sociology Department, University of Pennsylvania; and consults through the Social Research Corporation.

Eleanor Lyon
University of Connecticut

A Time of Challenge and Opportunity

These are times of particular challenge and attendant opportunity for sociological practitioners. We share with sociologists in general—both inside and outside the academy—the challenges associated with changes in the political climate for research and other projects, as well as in funding. We also face challenges more particular to sociologists who identify themselves as practitioners.

Broadly speaking, issues of identity and definition continue to challenge us. These questions have become more visible within ASA with recent discussions of “*public sociology*”. While we understand that all sociologists engage in public “practice” and “application” to some degree (at least through teaching), this continuum ranges from indirect application in the classroom to more direct practice in working with and within local, state and federal organizations outside of the academy. Sociologists seem to grant increasing legitimacy to involvement in significant public policy matters, but continue to debate other roles. Despite widespread “application” however, the numbers of ASA members who demonstrate their identification through formal membership in the Practice Section is growing only slowly.

Definition and identity questions are also part of the discussions surrounding the formal development of the independent Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology (AACS), forming from a merger of the Sociological Practice Association and the Society for Applied Sociology. These discussions are needed and healthy, if sometimes difficult, as this organization develops a new organizational culture and structure.

This year also brings several opportunities for section members and other practicing sociologists.

- The Practice Section is reaching out to other ASA Sections, many of whose members engage in “applied” work, to expand our membership and opportunities for collaborative efforts of various kinds. Section Secretary and past Chair Leora Lawton has taken the lead in this initiative. Our current members can help by encouraging this joint effort among their colleagues, by specifically asking practicing colleagues to join the section.
- The ASA is revising the Directory of Programs in Applied Sociology & Sociological Practice, with Jeffrey R. Breese and Jay Weinstein as editors. This is a way to increase the visibility of educational programs with a practice focus and to facilitate networking opportunities.
- The ASA is also sponsoring a survey of members whose primary employment is outside an academic setting. Although the survey is directed at sociologists who hold Ph.D.s, and as such has limitations, it will begin to address a major gap in information and visibility about important sociological work.

It is vital for us at this juncture to support these efforts and to think creatively about additional ways we can be involved and help to shape the dialog and definitions that will influence our future within the discipline. The time to increase the ways we “practice” our sociology professionally, both within and outside the ASA, is now!

SHOSTAK TO BE HONORED IN MONTREAL

Long-time member of the Sociological Practice Section Arthur B. Shostak, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Drexel University in Philadelphia, will be the recipient of this year’s ASA Distinguished Career Award for the Practice of Sociology. This award honors outstanding contributions to sociological practice that have served as a model for others and have elevated the professional status of the field as a whole, as well as work that has been widely recognized outside the discipline for its significant impacts, particularly in advancing human welfare.

The ASA Launches Survey of Doctoral Level Sociologists Employed in Applied Practice Settings

By ROBERTA SPALTER-ROTH
Director, Research and Development, ASA

The ASA has joined with other professional societies, including the Rural Sociological Society and the newly-merged Society for Applied Sociology and Sociological Practice Association, to survey PhD sociologists employed in applied and research settings as researchers, program evaluators, administrators, policy makers, advocates, experts, consultants, etc. in order to increase their visibility. The Ford Foundation provided funding for this project.

We are particularly interested in looking at the skills these non-academic sociologists use in their work. We will investigate how they are using their graduate school training, how their productivity is evaluated, their relations with other sociologists, and their career satisfaction. Our questionnaire was developed and tested in meetings with sociologists employed in government, non-profit organizations, and independent practice. The results will inform the growing interest in the relationship between sociological skills taught as part of the graduate school curricula and the post-graduate experiences of PhDs. ASA and our partners will widely disseminate the summary results (individual information remains confidential), in an effort to enhance opportunities and services for all sociologists, gain media recognition for non-academic sociologists, and assist departments in curriculum development.

The survey is directed at those employed outside of the professorate and in applied and research sectors. The on-line survey has already been distributed to all sociologists that are members of the ASA via email inviting them to participate. Sociologists currently employed in applied settings or in private practice as consultants who wish to volunteer to participate in this study can contact me at the email address below. An optional, brief module on career choices is available for those survey respondents who are interested, and a report of survey results will be available to all participants. We hope that those of you whose employment qualifies you will participate. Please address any questions to Dr. Roberta Spalter-Roth, ASA's Research and Development Director, at spalter-roth@asanet.org.

Annual Meeting of the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology* October 26-28, Crowne Plaza Hotel, San Jose, CA “Sociology for What: Building Our World”

We seek proposals for workshops, panels, papers, poster presentations, and roundtables that discuss applied and clinical sociology with regard to the discipline, the academy, government agencies, organizations, and consulting firms. The 2006 meeting will be innovative in the way sessions are organized and papers are presented. Rather than the standard formal presentations that characterize academic and professional meetings, we seek workshops; panel, roundtable and participatory sessions; as well as sessions to discuss papers that will have been pre-published on a website and pre-read by participants. Those in related fields are also invited to submit proposals and participate. We welcome suggestions for sessions at this time.

Proposal Submission Deadline: June 30, 2006.
Contact Benjamin Ben-Baruch. (E-Mail: AACS2006ProgramChair@aacnet.org)
Vice-President and Program Chair,
4789 Pine Bluff Ste 3C, Ypsilanti MI 48197; (734) 528-1439; fax (303) 479-1321.
More information at www.aacsnet.org

* The AACS was formed through the merger of two long-standing organizations: the Sociological Practice Association, founded in 1979 as the Clinical Sociology Association, and the Society for Applied Sociology, founded in 1982.

Continuing a column of the Sociological Practice section's newsletter – helpful hints and suggestions for the business of being a sociologist. Please share your words of wisdom with your fellow practitioners, or just suggest a topic, by contacting me (lawton at techsociety.com).

The Practical Sociologist

Tips for Sociologists in Private Practice

By LEORA LAWTON

Having a business card and other paraphernalia of a professional enterprise is important for consultants in managing impressions. In business, one of the first things that happen at meetings, as introductions are made, is the exchange of business cards. Practices around the handling of business cards vary from culture to culture. Not following business card etiquette may imply that you consider the other person to be inferior. In the US, writing notes on the back is common, but would be frowned upon in Japan, where business cards are to be treated gently and put in a place where they won't get bent or mangled. The Chinese love exchanging business cards. In Finland, business cards are presented without ritual, but the card should be readable when the recipient sees it and then treated with respect afterwards. When doing business internationally, the text of the card is in English on one side, and in the other language on the other. Bruno Wengrowski, a professor at the Defense Acquisition University (www.dau.mil) wrote about business cards in an essay about conducting negotiations overseas:

.... The business card should be kept in a small container in the breast pocket of the shirt or suit coat, not in a wallet in the pants pocket. This creates the impression that the person carrying the card considers the other person important enough to make a presentation from the heart. Most countries have a ritual associated with the presentation of the card. For example in Asia, the card is held with both hands and the person presenting gently nods his/her head.”¹

A website offering advice to international business persons notes that in Indonesia business cards should be somewhat ornate, with careful attention to the name and title,

“Business cards should be exchanged immediately, after an initial handshake and greeting. Also, ensure that the card is offered with your right hand, facing the recipient. When you receive another person's card, make a show of carefully examining it for a few moments and then remarking upon it before putting it in your card case or on a nearby table.”²

Given the number of professional ‘hats’ we wear as applied sociologists, it may be difficult to have the right business card for the every occasion. The Internet has brought yet another helpful innovation: quick and inexpensive professional quality business cards. You can design and order the printing online, and the cards can be in your mailbox in a matter of days at prices as low as about \$15 for 250 cards. You can use the supplied formats, or upload your own logo. One such place is www.printsmadeeasy.com. I tried it out, and it worked marvelously. I didn't see an option for embossed cards, but fortunately I'm not traveling to Indonesia soon. Another recommended place is www.vistaprint.com, where you can also make brochures and other marketing materials. The price for brochures is more expensive than cards because of production costs, but still quite reasonable. Two more sites to consider are www.iprint.com and www.professorprint.com.

1. “The Importance of Culture and Bargaining in International Negotiations” Bruno S. Wengrowski, in *Defense AT&L*: September-October 2004. 26-29.
2. <http://www.executiveplanet.com/business-culture-in/132276203920.html> “Let's make a deal, Part I”.

Encourage two colleagues to join the section this year

The ASA Practice Section and the AACS – Two Organizational Homes for Sociological Practitioners

By KATHRYN GOLDMAN SCHUYLER
Alliant International University

I believe that the field of sociology needs both the Section for Sociological Practice of the ASA and the new Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology (AACS). I am convinced that the combination of the two will help the profession to thrive. While some members belong to both, I suspect that increasingly the membership will be composed of different people, with different primary interests. During my career, my own focus and activities have evolved. As they changed, I was drawn toward differing types of organizations. I suspect this has been true for many of you. If we have two strong organizations for sociological practitioners that differ in nature, it makes the profession more viable.

In the years immediately after graduate school, I attended the national ASA meetings. I wanted a picture of sociology as a whole, and I was coming out of years of research, beginning to move more towards practice. ASA national meetings met my needs.

I learned about the Clinical Sociology Association (CSA) in 1984 and was among one of the first to become a certified clinical sociologist. The annual meetings were small, informal, and highly interactive. I felt at home with the people and their interests and enjoyed reading the *Clinical Sociology Review*. As I became primarily an organizational consultant with no academic affiliation, the ASA began to seem rather large and academic. For many years, CSA and then the Sociological Practice Association (SPA), as it re-named itself, gave me a national organizational base and group of colleagues within the field of sociology. I valued my certification and found that clients were intrigued by it, although they had not previously heard the term *clinical sociologist*. I think it made them comfortable to know that my peers respected my work and certified me as having clinical competence. CSA/SPA contributed much to the profession of sociology through its lively annual meetings, its publication of the *Clinical Sociology Review*, and the development and stewardship of a thorough and practice-based certification process.

When my interests evolved and I returned to graduate teaching in addition to maintaining a practice, I re-joined the ASA and Practice Section, maintained my connections with the more ‘family-style’ SPA, and joined the Society for Applied Sociology (SAS) as well. When told by one of the SAS officers that the two organizations were considering merging, I was delighted. It made immediate sense that we should have one independent practice organization rather than two. SAS was highly regarded for its conferences, with excellent training workshops on applied topics such as the development of applied curricula/programs, methods, ethics and IRBs, its *Journal of Applied Sociology*, and its lively on-line list-serve. Several officers have been ASA Fellows in DC. And leaders of both organizations had collaborated to create the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology.

Having clinicians, consultants, and applied researchers in one organization makes sense. The first meeting of the new organization, the AACS, took place at last summer’s ASA meeting in Philadelphia. Next October will be the first independent meeting of the new organization, where we can begin to create its culture and style. The dissolution of the two prior organizations and birth of this new one has had a few ‘bumps in the road,’ owing to the sheer difficulty of managing such a transition through volunteer labor, but I am confident that the AACS will grow and play an increasingly important role in sociology over the next few decades. This initial conference will take place October 26-28 in San Jose, with the theme “*Sociology for What: Building Our World*”.

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101st Annual Meeting of the ASA

Globalization Session at Montreal ASA Meeting

The 101st Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association is August 11-14, 2006 in Montreal Canada. The convention theme, "Great Divides: Transgressing Boundaries," explores the complex processes and institutional underpinnings that create boundaries.

On Friday August 11, there will be an invited symposium session organized by Practice Section Chair-Elect Kristine J Ajrouch, entitled *Sociological Practice and the Consequences of Globalization*. The symposium addresses the application of sociological concepts to social problems resulting from forces of globalization. Ingrid A. Connidis (University of Western Ontario) will discuss *Globalization and Family Relations*. Louise Cainkar (University of Illinois) will present work on *Using Sociological Theory to Defuse the "Clash of Civilizations" and Conflicts over Mosques in Suburban Neighborhoods*. Denise Reiling (Eastern Michigan University) presents research on *The Globalizing Influence of the Internet on the Health, Well-Being, and Culture of the Old Order Amish*. Marv Finklestein (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville) closes with *The Ivory Tower in a Flat World: The University and Applied Sociology in the Global Economy*. For further information about the upcoming ASA meeting, consult the ASA website at www.asanet.org.

ASA Seeks Submissions for Revised Edition of the Directory of Academic Programs in Applied Sociology and Sociological Practice

By JEFFREY R. BREESE
Marymount University

The ASA is soliciting submissions for inclusion in the upcoming revised edition of the Directory of Programs in Applied Sociology and Sociological Practice. The association encourages all academic institutions in the United States with an applied clinical practice focus or degree program to provide a submission.

Submissions are to be made electronically and need to include the following: institution contact/address information, web link to the program/department, names of all departmental faculty and their contact information, listings of degree programs in applied sociology, and an indication if the program is accredited or in process of accreditation by the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology. Programs and departments do not have to be in the formal accreditation process in order to be included in the directory. Each institution must include a narrative statement that describes the nature of the concentrations, special courses, certificates, and internships that make up the program in applied or clinical sociology that they offer to their students.

Each institution will be limited to one page one page of copy in the directory. The editors for this edition of the directory are Jeffrey R. Breese and Jay Weinstein. Questions and submissions should be sent to the following email address: jeffrey.breese@marymount.edu. You can also contact Dr Breese at (703) 284-1546 for information about directory submissions. The deadline for submissions is May 1, 2006.

Practice Section Seeks Newsletter Editor

The Practice Section of the ASA will transition to a new editor for this newsletter over the coming year.

We seek someone interested in producing a lively, informative newsletter two or three times per year. Requires person who anticipates deadlines, writes and edits capably, can do layout, and needs no supervision. Ideally: good at enrolling others in writing columns and news. Previous experience producing a similar publication is desirable, but not essential.

Interested? Contact Kathryn Goldman Schuyler, kgschuyler@alliant.edu.

Point of View

Honoring Curiosity

By JOHN GLASS
Colin County Community College

I used to work as the Director of Program Evaluation for a non-profit agency in Dallas. I developed, implemented, and monitored outcome evaluations for our agency. Needless to say, much of my work was driven by attempting to satisfy someone's curiosity about our programs; typically, the curiosity of the people who give us money, but, our own, too. Some of the questions I was asked (and I asked) were: Did our programs work? What did they do? Did clients benefit from receiving our services? How did clients benefit? How much did they benefit? Good questions to ask by someone who is curious about our programs.

One fall, I was working with an intern from a local university. He was pursuing a master's degree in applied sociology and had an interest in program evaluation. My role was to assist him in developing and implementing an evaluation of one of our programs.

In discussing the plan and the proposed methodology (focus group format) with him, I found myself talking about the need to be curious when collecting data from people. I told him to really *be* curious about the people whom he was talking to. Know that they are *people*, not "subjects," not "clients," not, "data sources," but *humans*, people, just like him and me.

After he left, I reflected on this notion of truly being curious and the benefits that can be derived from doing so. I realized that curiosity is something that is undervalued in our world and shouldn't be, because it has some incredible qualities. The four I will address are wonder, innocence, intimacy, and a desire to know others.

Curiosity as Wonder

When I am curious about someone, I find myself "wondering" about him or her. I don't wonder as a way to generate "knowledge" about that someone else. I wonder about him or her because I enjoy wondering. It is a phenomenal process that clears my mind, opens my heart, and prepares me for honest, thorough, and humble inquiry into the life of someone else. Furthermore, I experience wondering about someone as an appetizing pastime that stirs my spirit and awakens a connection to something greater than myself.

I believe that to be a fine researcher and practitioner, one must have a deep appreciation of wonder. Life and people are not rational, linear enterprises, despite what some would have us believe. Rather, life and people are "wonderful." Life is mysterious and so are we. There is no end to how we are, how we act, how we think, how we make sense, etc. We are endless in the depths of ourselves. As practitioners and researchers, we need to acknowledge this.

Curiosity as Innocence

I find that when I am curious about something or someone, I approach that something with a sense of innocence about it. I try to cultivate and then relish the sense of innocent inquiry that children have when investigating a hand or a face or an airplane for the first time. In fact, I don't know that curiosity can exist in the absence of innocence.

Ironically, in the realm of sociological inquiry or practice, innocence oftentimes is seen as something that needs to be overcome. Typically, we don't look for an "innocent" researcher or practitioner, but a "seasoned" or an "experienced" one. I would suspect, however that those really good "seasoned-experienced" folk have a depth of innocence only a child could surpass. In fact, I would bet that being innocent is one thing that their experience or seasoning has taught them to be.

Valuable inquiry or practice is actually not possible without a sense of innocence. It is only when one is innocent that one can learn. If there is no innocence, then there is "no room" for "knowledge" or "experience" or "growth" because one's mind is already filled. Innocence wipes the mind clean in a very efficient, beautiful, and humane way.

Curiosity as Intimacy

The desire to be curious about another to the fullest extent possible is to want to know them intimately. As we know, intimacy is when one is the most open, the most vulnerable, the most fragile, and as such, requires the most care. To allow another to be intimate in one's presence, one must demonstrate the utmost respect for the other, as the other is truly exposing herself or himself. Being intimate is not easy to do, nor do others frequently reinforce it with respect and honor. Many people have had painful experiences when being intimate in the past, when others did not respect their most intimate sense of self. Sometimes one's purported "curiosity" of the other is manipulative and deceitful. As researchers/practitioners, we *need* to be able to be intimate with others as part of our work. We do this through being curious about them in a safe and protective manner.

Curiosity as Desiring to Know Another

Desiring to know another is not the same as knowing another. One can be in a relationship with someone for many years and still desire to know them – or one may not. Curiosity as a desire to know another is an attitude, an approach toward life, not an end point. In fact, I would question whether the product of the desire to know another is indeed, "knowledge" of that other. With regard to curiosity, knowledge is not the end point; it is not the purpose of "knowing" another. Rather, it is just that desiring to know, the quality of cherishing that which may be "forever knowing, yet never known." When we claim knowledge of something, curiosity dies and something else sets in. In fact, once one starts accumulating "knowledge" desire dies, curiosity dies, and oftentimes, respect dies.

Curiosity, then, is something that does indeed need to be honored. It is an approach to being with another that is often times overlooked when engaging in research or practice. To be sure, it does occur within these contexts. However, when it occurs with the depth of what curiosity has to offer the practitioner/researcher and the client, the outcome is decidedly different and decidedly more rewarding.

Professional Certification - Why it is Important to Sociologists Working in Applied Practice Settings

By MITCHELL A KAPLAN
Program Evaluation Consultant

Certification and licensing have become the benchmark of professional practice in most professions in the United States and around the world. In the health professions, most clinicians hold a professional license granted by the state education department. Licensure and certification give professionals in the health care field credibility and status within their community of peers and inspire confidence in the patients or clients they treat. All fifty states in this country have legally sanctioned professional licensing laws designed to protect the public welfare by guaranteeing that the practitioner has successfully met the educational and training requirements that are professionally necessary to provide the services sought and prohibits those who do not meet those requirements from providing similar services. Licensure also allows health care professionals to receive third party payments from insurance companies.

In the mental health field clinical psychologists and social workers have long been required by the state licensing board to pass an examination after they complete their graduate education. Professional certification on the other hand, is a requirement in many service professions that do not currently have a formal state licensing credential. Certification is a statement by a professional organization that a given individual is qualified to perform certain professional activities in accordance with the field's standards of professional practice.

For many years, most academically trained sociologists did not feel the need to seek professional certification because they were not offering their professional services to the public outside the classroom. This situation has begun to change as growing numbers of academically trained sociologists take on professional positions in nontraditional settings.

Practicing sociologists have been interested in and involved with the process of professional certification since the early 1980s. According to David J. Kallen, former President of the Clinical Sociology Association (CSA) and Editor of the *Clinical Sociology Review*, the CSA started a certification program for sociological practitioners that required applicants to have appropriate training in sociological theory and research methods, as well as in the uses of that theory and method in the real world. The CSA required that applicants for certification present a discussion of the ethics of their professional work to a committee of peers, describe their work, and demonstrate the specific relevance and validity of that work to the field of sociological inquiry.

Demonstrations of the applicant's professional work were conducted at the annual meetings of the practice association, the ASA, and other regional associations in the field of sociology. This required that both the applicant and a three-person review committee attend these meetings. The requirement that candidates demonstrate their work before an audience of peers was a major strength of the CSA certification program. However, over time there were less opportunities for practitioners to present their work at meetings, as fewer clinical sociologists were able and willing to devote the time and money necessary for maintaining the vitality of the program.

The ASA established a professional certification program for masters and doctoral level sociologists in the 1980's. It was subsequently phased out in the mid 1990's because not enough practitioners applied for certification under the program. According to Kallen, the majority of sociologists felt that the qualifying criteria used by the ASA certification program (such as academic courses completed, publications, and teaching experience) were not relevant to the kind of clinical and applied work they were doing as practitioners. The program was flawed in that the only thing an applicant needed to do to attain certification was to submit the appropriate paper work to the central office of the ASA in Washington.

According to Ann Charvat, current Chair of the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology Committee on Practitioner Certification and a leading expert on this issue, certification provides the opportunity for sociologists to attain a professionally recognized credential that allows non-academic practitioners to identify themselves as professionals whose work has been sanctioned and governed by a national set of ethical standards. She further contends that certification insures the public that the theory and methods used by practitioners have been stringently peer reviewed and are consistent with the standards of professional practice. Certification as a practitioner places sociologists in the unique position to get support from their colleagues who are involved in applying their specialized knowledge and skills to help others. Charvat herself has often served as an expert witnesses and mediator in criminal and family law cases.

Debate continues over the establishment of a universal certification standard for sociologists working outside traditional academic settings. However, it appears that the majority of practitioners agree that certification does have concrete value within the changing scope of our profession and should continue to be offered to sociologists through the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology.