

THE NORTH CENTRAL SOCIOLOGIST

The Official Newsletter of the North Central Sociological Association

Spring/Summer 2017

2107 NCSA Presidential Address

*"Peace in a Time of Polarization:
All We are Saying is Give Peace a Chance"*
Debra Swanson, Hope College

In her 2017 NCSA presidential address, Dr. Debra Swanson considered the recent presidential election, and the impact of polarization on our political structure, on social life, on peace/violence, and more broadly, on our ability to connect with those who are different. This poses an especially unique problem in the classroom, where polarization has the capacity to undermine learning and critical thinking. Focusing on how we have become polarized, she outlined the myriad ways in which polarization is profoundly harmful to our humanity. However, sociology can help bridge the immense divide that emerged prior to, during, and following the 2016 election. She implored audience members to "give peace a chance" and actively thwart the polarization that characterizes our nation, and our world. Here, she shares some of the insights offered in her address.

A Thoughtful Commentary on Polarization...

I was surprised by the election results. I was surprised because the academics and pollsters predicted the outcome incorrectly, but I was also surprised because the campaign culture felt so mean and polarized. Like many Americans, I breathed a sigh of relief to be done with all of the negativity and political posturing that characterized the presidential race. However, it was not done. And it is not done now. Indeed, political polarization continues to increase, and research shows that increased polarization is related to an increase in violence.

What is political polarization?

Political polarization is the bifurcation of neighbors, classmates, friends, and colleagues into separate ideological camps based on their political affiliation; a sense that we know who they are based on their party affiliation. Oh, you are "one of those!" As an academic, I responded to this reality by doing what I was trained to do. I looked to the literature for answers. Here is what I found.

Political polarization **impacts politics** by making it impossible for those from different political parties to talk to each other. And while political polarization is not new, it has become more entrenched, and so much so that we begin to believe that the other side is not simply different, but patently wrong. Citizens are so attached to their own party affiliation that the political party of a candidate has become more important than the issues they stand for or the party platform they represent.

Political polarization also **impacts our relationships with other people**. We are more likely to live in neighborhoods with people who think and vote like us. And, we even discourage our children from marrying someone from the other party, which increases polarization. We isolate ourselves, falling victim to our own insular social groups.

Finally, political polarization **impacts our campuses**. Polarization leads to a greater emphasis on difference instead of on our shared humanity. As sociologists, we teach the sociological imagination, which at its core advocates for empathy and inquiry.

What can we do about political polarization?

There are no easy answers! We have to claim a positive vision that is good for everyone. We have to be more inclusive. And, we need to intentionally teach peace.



Debra Swanson, NCSA 2017

In This Issue...

2017 Presidential Address.....	Page 1
2017 Plenary Address.....	Page 2 & 3
2018 Conference Preview.....	Page 3
2017 Student Paper Awards.....	Page 4
2017 NCSA Award Winners.....	Page 5
Dialogue/Diversity & Sociological Focus.....	Page 6
From the Desk of the New President.....	Page 7
2017-2018 NCSA Council.....	Page 8



Dr. Bruce Keith's "The Dynamics of Social Systems "

Dr. Bruce Keith delivered the 2017 Ruth and John Useem Plenary Address in Indianapolis, Indiana. Debra Swanson, outgoing NCSA president, highlights a selection of the key takeaways from the plenary.

The 2017 Ruth and John Useem Plenary Address

Dr. Bruce Keith wowed his audience with a challenge to sociologists to be more forward thinking by adopting a dynamic systems approach to inform our understanding of complex interdisciplinary problems. Sociological research is inherently historical; data is gathered in the present or past, then analyzed to make sense of embedded relationships. He demonstrated the sociologist's and social scientist's penchant for research as being analogous to walking forward while facing backward. Keith encouraged sociologists to turn around, and face forward by incorporating simulation modelling as a compliment to other research methodologies.

We are confronted with complex multidisciplinary social challenges that would benefit from forward thinking systems analysis. System Dynamics is one well-established methodological tool that incorporates non-linear causal models of internal feedback and time delays to estimate the outcomes of extant quantifiable social behavior. To illustrate, Keith described the 1972 Limits to Growth model, developed by a group of scientists at MIT. Their model simulated various future outcomes involving the interactions of population growth, finite resources, capital investment, agricultural yields, pollution, and life quality, showing how population growth, once it overshoot the resource capacity in an increasingly polluted environment, would collapse. Their time horizon was 40 to 50 years. Although many countries and pundits criticized their work, subsequent data collection efforts have shown the original projections to be largely on target. Other than economists, why were the voices of social scientists largely absent from this debate? Keith surmised that it is hard to see "overshoot and collapse" scenarios when your data are historically embedded in growth mode.

Keith showed how behavior (as a distribution) is a function of underlying structure. He diagrammed problems such as climate change, immigration, and pandemics using this layered approach.

On the surface – the part of the iceberg that we can see – behavioral outcomes and structure appear to be separate, but in reality are tightly coupled. Such complexity and connections represent the unseen but structural mass of the iceberg under the water. Seemingly simple systems are actually nonlinear.

Keith illustrated these relationships by describing six typical types of distributions (exponential, goal seeking, oscillation, s-shaped or diffuse growth, s-shaped with oscillation, and overshoot and collapse or u-shaped). With knowledge of the type of distribution likely to be encountered (a dynamic hypothesis), one can build a extant structure within a given context that is capable of generating the expected behavior. The power of this analysis is that the model allows for validation against historically observed evidence and generates simulated future distributions by manipulating exogenous model inputs to assess the sensitivity of such changes on future behavioral trends. The results provide opportunities for discussion of the modelling assumptions as well as potentially informing decision-making strategies that might mitigate worst-case scenario outcomes.

Take, for example, undocumented immigration. Keith borrowed a description of undocumented Mexican immigrants from Doug Massey and his colleagues' 2002 book, *Smoke and Mirrors*, illustrating that they described a system of migratory behavior from 1850 through the 1990s, which captured a cyclical process, changing in direct response to structural changes. Keith illustrated the relationship between the state variable (numbers of undocumented immigrants) and changes in the structure of border actions through a set of causal loop diagrams. With changes in the push and pull factors driving immigration, coupled with shifts in action taken by the US, numbers of undocumented immigrants changed, but often in unexpected ways.

Ruth and John Useem Plenary Address, Cont.

Keith described these outcomes, borrowing a term from Robert Merton, as the unexpected consequences of purposive action. Undocumented immigration actually increased, despite increased raids and fatalities, because of the evolving, more geographically dispersed, and entrenched nature of the situation. System dynamics modelling permits an examination of unintended consequences like this via simulations in an effort to inform decisions regarding public actions.

Sociology is positioned to address these sorts of complex social issues, but, as Keith reminds us, not with our current perspective and methods. "The discipline [of Sociology] has failed to advance anything that resembles a scientific law capable of managing future social outcomes with any degree of accuracy." Disciplinary research products are more descriptive than predictive, due to both the theory and the methods we employ. Additionally, with a nod to Stephen Cole, the discipline appears much more akin to the production of frontier rather than core knowledge. As shown in a 2004 article by Keith and Ender, the vast majority of the 3000-plus concepts used in introductory sociology textbooks published in the 1940s and 1990s appear only once. Indeed, only 11 concepts had 100%

agreement and less than 100 appeared in 50% of the texts.

The discipline, Keith surmised, lacks both consensus on core knowledge and the ability to predict future outcomes, both of which tend to be a necessary condition for the claim of being a science. Keith argued that system dynamics links together structure and behavior in a manner that produces more law-like outcomes. It also aligns quite well with Lester Ward's 1883 thesis of sociology as a dynamic modelling effort capable of informing public discourse on socially structured outcomes. Structures are the product of public discourse that, over time, often become an iron cage that constrains behavior. Indeed, as Karl Marx opined in the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, while people make their own history, they make it in response to structures and events anchored in the past. Keith offered an alternative paradigm based on a well-established methodology largely unknown in the social sciences, which compliments the discipline's extant methods, and improves the positioning of the discipline in addressing sociological problems in a more complex, open-ended, and forward-thinking manner.

Like all good speeches, this one continues to haunt me.

2018 NCSA Conference Preview



NCSA 2018 Annual Meeting Returns to Pittsburgh, April 6-7

Important Dates

August, 2017

Online submission opens

November, 2017

Online registration/Hotel reservations open

December, 2017

Proposal information due to program organizers

Early January, 2017

Undergraduate paper submissions due

January, 2017

Notification of acceptance into conference

March, 2017

Hotel registration and Pre-registration closes

April 5th, 2017

Pre-conference workshops held

April 6th, 2017

NCSA conference begins

The 2018 NCSA conference will be held in Pittsburgh from April 6th—7th. The official conference hotel is the Sheraton Pittsburgh Hotel at Station Square, located at 300 West Station Square Drive, in the heart of the bustling downtown. The theme of the conference is "Crime, Punishment, and In/Justice." As sociologists and criminologists, we are compelled to examine the notions of justice and injustice, as well as the multifaceted ways in which the personal, social, structural, and institutional intertwine to advance or suppress justice.

Do you have an idea for a workshop? A conversation? A session? A screening? An event? An experience? Even if your conference idea does not speak directly to the theme, we want to hear from you! If you have an concept you would like to explore before formally submitting it for the conference, please contact Rachel Stein at Rachel.Stein@mail.wvu.edu. We are looking forward to an inspiring conference and hope you can join us in Pittsburgh in 2018!



2017 Student Award Winners

Seidler Graduate Paper Awards

1st Place

Clayton Thomas, Indiana University

"Love Isn't Too Strong of a Word: Emotional Support and the Persistence of a Voluntary Association's Membership"

Advisor: Brian Powell

2nd Place

Benjamin Andrews, The Ohio State University

"College Costs and Credit Cards: How Student Credit Card Use Influences College Degree Attainment and Fulfillment of Educational Expectations"

Advisor: Rachel Dwyer

3rd Place

Kristin Kelley, Indiana University

"Does Marital Name Choice Cause Women And Men To Be Evaluated Differently?"

Advisor: Brian Powell

President's Undergraduate Paper Awards

1st Place

Leanna Gonino, Central Michigan University

"Blacks' and Whites' Attitudes toward Race-based Policies: Is There an Obama Effect?"

Advisor: Elbert Almazan

2nd Place

Taylor Morgan, University of Cincinnati-Blue Ash

"The Rape as Theft Frame: The Role of Intimate Partners in the Depiction of Sexual Assault on Popular Television"

Advisor: Todd Callais

3rd Place

Nikki Brown, Indiana University-Kokomo

"Influences on Attitudes Regarding Corporal Punishment"

Advisor: Stephanie Medley-Rath

2017 NCSA Award Winners



Scholarly Achievement Award (Book)

Jamie Longazel, University of Dayton

Longazel, Jamie. (2016). *Undocumented Fears: Immigration and the Politics of Divide and Conquer in Hazleton, Pennsylvania*. Temple University Press.



Scholarly Achievement Award (Article)

Robert F. Carley, Texas A&M University

Carley, Robert F. (2016). Ideological Contention: Antonio Gramsci and the Connection between Race and Social Movement Mobilization in Early Twentieth Century Italy. *Sociological Focus* 49 (1): 28-43.



J. Milton Yinger Lifetime Achievement Award

Kathleen Piker-King, University of Mount Union



Aida Tomeh Distinguished Service Award

Brendan Mullen, Michigan State University



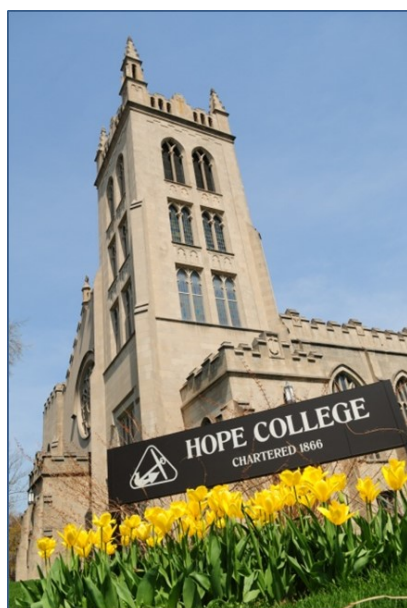
John F. Schnabel Teaching Award

Danielle Lavin-Loucks, Valparaiso University

Seeking to Promote Dialogue and Diversity?

IDDE

Institute for Intergroup Dialogue
and Diversity Education



Spend July 23-26, 2017 on the Lakeshore at Hope College

- ✕ Learn to engage in difficult and courageous conversations
- ✕ Promote an inclusive campus climate through dialogue
- ✕ Utilize the IDDE model to integrate diversity education for students, faculty, and staff
- ✕ Center diversity education on 'understanding others' rather than engaging in 'othering'
- ✕ Participate in a unique professional development seminar intended to address challenges in the classroom and across campus

**Registration is now OPEN, but availability is limited.
For more information, and to register, please visit:**

<http://faculty.hope.edu/johnston/IDDECU/>

SOCIOLOGICAL FOCUS

Consider submitting your manuscript to ***Sociological Focus***, the official publication of the *North Central Sociological Association* (NCSA). Published continuously since 1968, the quarterly journal is international in scope, covering a full range of topics of current interest to sociology and related social science disciplines. ***Sociological Focus*** is peer reviewed and committed to publishing high quality research on substantive issues of importance to the study of society. The journal's mission is broad in scope, encompassing empirical works (both quantitative and qualitative in nature), as well as manuscripts presenting up to date literature review of any field of sociology. Look for upcoming issues focused on a specific theme, and dedicated to timely topics. Current author and submissions guidelines available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/usfo20#.VE-62fldWTM>

EDITORIAL STAFF

Annulla Linders , Editor, *University of Cincinnati*
Cynthia C. Carlton-Ford , Assistant Editor, *University of Cincinnati*
Robert K. Shelly , Consulting Editor, *Ohio University*
Steve Carlton-Ford , Consulting Editor, *University of Cincinnati*
Gustavo Mesch, Consulting Editor, *University of Haifa*
Kathleen Gish , Editorial Assistant, *University Cincinnati*
Kent P. Schwirian , Founding Editor, *Ohio State University*

From the Desk of the New NCSA President...

Crime, Punishment, and In/Justice Chosen as the Theme for 2018



The theme for the 2018 meeting in Pittsburgh will be Crime, Punishment and In/Justice. The line between justice and injustice has always been blurry and keeps generating questions about “whose justice?” The question is highly relevant in a number of institutional settings – education, politics, health, work, family, culture – but perhaps nowhere more urgent than in the field of crime and punishment. At every turn of the criminal justice process fresh questions concerning justice arise. Posing questions about what kinds of activities are criminal, what kinds of people get punished, and whose interests are protected by the criminal justice system, scholarship keeps demonstrating not only deep and pervasive inequities but also astounding contradictions in the law and its enforcement. Corporate elites can get away with stealing millions from employee retirement funds while the person who robs a corner store of a few hundred dollars can spend years in prison. “Quality of life” harassments (jay walking, spitting) entangle inner-city youth in the criminal justice system whereas energy corporations get tax breaks for polluting and depleting the environment for future generations. But so much more work needs to be done to reveal the full extent to which injustice pervades the law and criminal justice system. To help inspire the many of you who work in areas that in various ways deal with crime, punishment, and in/justice, we have recruited Professor Victor Rios to deliver the John and Ruth Useem Plenary Address during the 2018 conference. As many of you know, Dr. Rios has produced some of the most important work in this area, including the award winning book entitled *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. A brief introduction to our Plenary speaker is below. We look forward to seeing you in Pittsburgh in 2018.

2018 Ruth and John Useem Plenary Address

Dr. Victor Rios, University of California-Santa Barbara

The NCSA is honored to introduce Dr. Victor Rios, the 2018 Ruth and John Useem Plenary speaker. The author of five books, Professor Rios's work analyzes the role of social control and education in determining the well-being of young people living in urban marginality; tracks the social consequences of the punitive state and punitive social control-across institutional settings; and examines young people's resilience and responses to social marginalization. Professor Rios is the winner of the 2017 Public Understanding of Sociology Award, which is given to a "person or persons who have made exemplary contributions to advance the public understanding of sociology, sociological research, and scholarship among the general public."

Rios's award-winning book, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* (NYU Press, 2011), analyzes how juvenile crime policies and criminalization affect the everyday lives of urban youth, generating the school to prison pipeline that has come to define the experience of low income, minority students. In his latest book *Human Targets: Schools, Police, and the Criminalization of Latino Youth* (University of Chicago Press, 2017) Rios finds the traditional good kid/bad kid, street kid/decent kid dichotomy overly simplistic, arguing instead that authorities and institutions helped create these identities—and that they can play an instrumental role in providing young people with the resources for shifting roles. In the end, he concludes that to be a poor Latino youth is to be a human target—victimized and considered an enemy by others, viewed as a threat to law enforcement and schools, and burdened by stigma, disrepute, and punishment.

Over one million people have viewed his TED talk on effective strategies for shifting attitudes in education. His talk calls for fellow educators to see "at-risk" students as students brimming with promise, who display the type of resilience, character, and grit that ultimately define success. Make sure to view the inspirational and poignant TED talk prior to the conference.

You can view his inspirational talk at: https://www.ted.com/talks/victor_rios_help_for_kids_the_education_system_ignores



NCSA Welcomes

The NCSA is honored to welcome new council and committee members:

- ✕ President Elect: Melinda Messineo, Ball State University
- ✕ Vice President Elect: Mellisa Holtzman, Ball State University
- ✕ Council Member-at-Large: Chien-Juh Gu, Western Michigan University
- ✕ Student Paper Awards Chair: Pam Koch, Hope College
- ✕ Teaching Section/Schnabel Award Chair: Tamika Odum, University of Cincinnati
- ✕ Student Section Chair: Shaonta Allen, University of Cincinnati

Are you are interested in becoming more involved in NCSA and serving as an elected or appointed committee member? Please contact the Past President and Nominations Chair, Debra Swanson, at Swansond@hope.edu.

Contact Us

Keep up to date with NCSA! Visit us on [Facebook](#) or the official [NCSA website](#) for association and conference -related information.

If you have items you would like sent to the distribution list, or posted to Facebook, please send the materials for consideration to the [NCSA Public Relations Coordinator](#).

2017-2018 NCSA Council and Committee Members

Annula Linders, President
University of Cincinnati
Annula.Linders@uc.edu

Rachel Stein, Vice President
West Virginia University
Rachel.Stein@mail.wvu.edu

Debra Swanson, Past President & Nominations Chair
Hope College
Swansond@hope.edu

Melinda Messineo, President Elect
Ball State University
Mmessine@bsu.edu

Mellisa Holtzman, Vice President Elect
Ball State University
Mkholtzman@bsu.edu

Lisa Hickman, Treasurer
Grand Valley State University
ncsasocconf@gmail.com

Rachel Kraus, Secretary (2015-2018)
Ball State University
Rkraus@bsu.edu

Monique Gregg, Council Member-at-Large (2016-2018)
University of St. Francis
Kgregg@alumni.nd.edu

Chien-Juh Gu, Council Member-at-Large (2017-2019)
Western Michigan University
Chien-juh.gu@wmich.edu

Shaonta Allen, Student Section Chair (2017-2019)
University of Cincinnati
Allen3se@Mail.UC.edu

Jeff Seymour, Membership Chair (2016-2018)
Carthage College
Jseymour@carthage.edu

Robyn White, Publication Policy Co-Chair
Cuyahoga Community College – West
Robyn.White@tri-c.edu

Chadwick Menning, Applied & Public Sociology Chair
Ball State University
Cmenning@bsu.edu

Lisa Hickman, Treasurer
Grand Valley State University
Hickmanl@gvsu.edu

Josh Woods, Profession, Freedom & Responsibility Chair
West Virginia University
Joshua.Woods@mail.wvu.edu

Annula Linders, Sociological Focus Editor
University of Cincinnati
Annula.Linders@uc.edu

Scott Desmond, Scholarly Achievement Award Chair
IUPUC
Scott.Desmond100@gmail.com

Kathleen Piker-King, Aida Tomeh Distinguished Service Award
University of Mount Union
Kingkd@mountunion.edu

Lynn Ritchey, J. Milton Yinger Distinguished Career Award
University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash
Lynn.Ritchey@uc.edu

Alan McEvoy, Undergraduate Student Papers
Northern Michigan University
Amcevoy@nmu.edu

Pam Koch, Student Paper Awards
Hope College
Kochp@hope.edu

Tamika Odum, Teaching Section/Schnabel Award Chair
University of Cincinnati
Odumtc@ucmail.uc.edu

Amaha Sellassie, Community Colleges Chair
Sinclair College/University of Cincinnati
Sellasaa@mail.uc.edu

Kent Schwirian, Publication Policy Co-Chair
Ohio State University
Schwirian.2@osu.edu