Greetings for the New Year

Dear fellow students,

The first newsletter of 2006 presents a glimpse of some of the critical social psychological work ongoing in society as well as in academia. Among these, special note is to be taken of the SPSSI conference to be held in Long Beach this year. The conference affords excellent scope for students engaged in research to interact on a personal level with researchers active in real world issues, and we invite you all to participate enthusiastically to make this event a success. We are currently also updating the student website with information pertinent to students’ research, and would welcome ideas from SPSSI student members about the content. Please contact me at rupu.gupta@cgu.edu with any suggestions you have. On behalf of the Graduate Student Committee, I would like to wish all of us a productive year in social research as we embark upon our respective projects.

Respectfully,

Rupanwita Gupta
Newsletter/Web Editor

The Power of Participatory Action Research

(As presented by Yasser Payne at the SPSSI Symposium of the Greater New York Undergraduate Research Conference, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2005)

One of the first things that drew me to SPSSI was that I quickly noticed it is an intellectual organization that takes social issues and notions of social justice seriously. Coming from a place and background or personal history where that is important to my value system, this became really important for me. In fact it was always important for me, especially as a developing scholar, to locate an intellectual space that took social justice seriously, so that I can function as a scholar and also as a person. And here is an organization that is willing to have that conversation.

Those of us interested in using research or intellectual inquiry as a means to organize and educate the community, as a means to achieve social justice or some notion of liberation, will come to find that there are not too many entities that are willing and able to support us. Sitting on that end (in the audience), I never realize the complexities of trying to go after notions of social justice, particularly within the confines of the academy. That’s why we need more of you on this end - driving the questions, driving the ideas, reframing the theoretical vision, asking the tough questions, making what we do more relevant to the lived experiences of people; thus, challenging, changing, developing and redeveloping the standards of practice.

As a social psychologist I am most interested in understanding how and why low-income Black or African men as well as Latino men develop a street life orientation. I am interested in how they think about the streets, how they frame or think about criminal behavior particularly through the standpoint of race, class and gender. So as low-income Black or African men how do they think about the streets? Or as low-income Latino men how do they think about the streets? Also,
how do these men frame notions of crime particularly in relation to notions of economic and educational opportunity? How do they frame their illegal activities in relation to community and family? What does resiliency or survival mean in the middle of all of this? I am also interested in not only how they think about their racial identity but how they experience race related stress. More importantly I am interested in how they think about all of that in relation to notions of social justice. Given what they have experienced in life and what’s realistically available to them in terms of opportunity, how do these men think about social justice? How is that organized and incorporated in the minds or psychology of the men? How is that incorporated in the lived experience of the streets? How does this make us, as researchers, policy makers, criminal justice members and professionals, think differently about those who engage in crime? Some may suggest that it is a bit of a stretch to suggest that notions of social justice or socio-economic and political liberation actually play a role in the thinking or psychology of these men.

To get at notions of social justice from the standpoint of the men, I conduct or organize studies called Participatory Action Research (PAR). Participatory Action Research is when you select members of a group or population you are interested in studying and directly place them in the research team and include them in every phase of the research project - theory, method, analysis, presentation, publication as well as monetary compensation. You do this as a way to guide, shape and develop, as fairly as possible, an analysis of a group that is generally misrepresented.

To date, for me that group has been street life oriented Black or African men and I am now beginning to look at the specific role Latino men play in the streets because of the current study I am working on in Rikers Island (New York City Jail) for my post-doctoral fellowship at Hunter College, CUNY. It is my position that generally these men’s lived experiences are poorly understood by researchers, policy makers and the criminal justice system at large. A PAR design allows another perspective to be in the room - in my case it forces the field to pay attention to a group of men who have mostly been ignored - who have never had a chance to speak back in a formal and recognized way.

In a recent project, I had the opportunity to work with four street life oriented Black or African men on a community based PAR project in Harlem, New York as well as Paterson, New Jersey. We were interested in documenting how these men frame notions of resiliency or survival in relation to how they think about the economic and educational opportunities in their communities. After organizing our research questions and research design we went into the streets of Harlem and Paterson to collect our data. We went where the drugs were sold and where the illegal gambling took place; we also went to people’s homes or hung out in various apartment complexes. It is important to note that we went to negative, neutral and positive places in which you can find these men and were greeted with overwhelming support from the streets. We collected over 400 surveys and a ton of interviews.

In short, we wanted to know what they thought about their school system or about the jobs in their community. Or if they thought the teachers in their school actually respected them, did they think that the teachers actually prepared them for college? And to what degree do those attitudes influence the development of a street life orientation? I am most interested in positioning an empirical response with and from the streets about all of that. So often, for right or for wrong, men in the streets are disrespectfully spoken of. What do they really think about their experiences? If they could organize a research project around all of that what would it look like?

To date, I have worked on four participatory action research projects and I’m gearing up for a fifth project in the next couple of months. For me, it is a solid way - one of several key ways - to achieve social justice and liberation for the community.

In my opinion, research in the 21st century has taken a turn back to a narrower, corporate, capitalistic and conservative set of standards as a way for doing things. In the current day and age we are rapidly losing resources and platforms as well as other means to conduct social justice based work with the community. As a research community, we are losing the means to give voice to the people - we are losing the means to allow the community to speak back in ways that can’t easily be ignored. It is important to note that social justice is more than passion. Social justice also is a site for intellectual exploration. It is an intellectual way for a marginalized people to piece back their liberation.

I am convinced that SPSSI is one of the few intellectual organizations that can and will play a major role in preserving and sustaining a voice, a platform and a recognized space for social justice oriented work in Psychology.

If we are to evoke real notions of social justice through an intellectual enterprise, such as Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire envisioned, or as Kenneth and Mamie Clark envision, if we really intend to get to that point, there will have to be an aggressive fusion between frontline line help or grass root movements and scholarship or the
academy for the larger community. In my opinion, SPSSI is one of the few institutions that would be willing to have that conversation.

The current conservative standards in our country and in the field of psychology have affected our intellectual fire. SPSSI is one of the few credible institutions left that can keep that torch lit. SPSSI will have to play a role in helping the community understand the power of research, at least in the full scope – the power that goes along with being able to define and frame your lived experiences – the power that goes along with being credited as an expert over a set of behavioral or attitudinal outcomes.

Depending on who you are and the set of experiences you come from, depending on your standpoint as a person, they will all contribute to how you see and do research; it will directly impact the kinds of questions that are asked, the kinds of research projects that are carried out and the kinds of papers and books that are ultimately written.

In closing, in the 21st century, thirst is growing and will continue to grow for more action oriented community based research or action research, a term coined by Kurt Lewin. There is so much research that could be done from the standpoint of the community to evoke notions of social justice especially given that the people of these communities would be largely supportive of such an endeavor— the potential is strong for a new kind of community scholarship. With more resources and more importantly, more diverse minds and spirits behind that potential, we literally can transform what we understand as research. That’s what I see in the 21st century - and I don’t think that is too ambitious - and I actually see SPSSI playing a key role in facilitating that possibility.

Yasser Payne
Post-doctoral research fellow
Hunter College, City University of New York

Upcoming SPSSI Convention --- Mark Your Calendars!

Every two years, SPSSI holds a stand-alone conference. The next biennial convention will be held from June 23rd-25th, 2006 at the Long Beach Hilton in Long Beach, CA. The theme of the convention is “Social Justice: Research, Action, and Policy,” and the program will consist of invited addresses, roundtable discussions, posters, panels, and symposia. The program will incorporate an array of topics from the perspective of both basic and applied researchers. In addition, the following events will focus on the specific needs of graduate students:

Roundtable devoted to journal writing and submissions: During this session, there will be an opportunity to meet with SPSSI journal editors.

Roundtable discussing models of successful mentoring: A senior faculty mentor will share tips, offer suggestions, and answer any of your questions.

Roundtable on the myriad job opportunities available after graduation: Academic and applied psychologists will share descriptions of their current positions and will answer questions regarding their chosen careers.

Mentor luncheon: Apply to attend the mentor luncheon via the student listserv (to join, subscribe at spssigsc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). At least 7 senior faculty members will share their experiences with graduate students over a casual lunch. Space is limited.

Socializing: On the first night of the convention, graduate students are invited to go out on the town with local students from Long Beach.

As more details are finalized, updated information will be made available on the SPSSI website (http://www.spssi.org/spssi_2006_Convention.html) and on the graduate student listserv. Check frequently for more information on the student programming and travel grants to the conference. This year, 10 students presenting research will be awarded $150 for travel. In addition, this is the first year SPSSI will be granting $500 in travel funds to 10 students from under represented populations (i.e. GLBT students, 1st generation college students, ethnic/racial minorities, and students with a physical disability). Additionally, SPSSI is offering discounted group rates to graduate students.

If you have been to a previous SPSSI convention, you know that not only is the program filled with many interesting talks, but it is also a great opportunity to meet other SPSSI graduate students and faculty in a more intimate setting than many of the other large psychology conferences. If you have not yet been to a SPSSI conference, this year’s program offers an exciting opportunity to learn more about what SPSSI scholars have accomplished in the past, as well as the chance to
hear firsthand about the research that current scholars are engaged in.

If you would like to assist with student programming or become involved in one of our graduate student committees, please contact me at jfranco@ucsc.edu.

We look forward to seeing you at the convention!

Jamie Franco
GSC Chair

JSI and ASAP Student Editor Nominations

With abundant student response to the calls for nominations, this year’s Journal of Social Issues (JSI) and Analysis of Social Issues and Public Policy (ASAP) student editor searches were very successful! There were 19 applicants for the JSI student editor position and 13 applicants for the ASAP position.

Congratulations to the new student editors! I-Ching Lee of the University of Connecticut was selected as the new student editor for JSI. In addition, 2005 JSI student editor Sara McClelland of the City University of New York will remain in her position for another year. Congratulations also to runners-up Carolin Hagelskamp of New York University and Carolyn Tompsett of Wayne State University.

Thomas Denson of the University of Southern California was selected as the new ASAP student editor. Congratulations also to runners-up Erica Fener of George Washington University, Erica Rosenthal of Claremont Graduate University, and Douglas Stenstrom of USC. Although these individuals were not selected for the student editor position, they will be invited to periodically review articles submitted for publication in ASAP.

Special thanks to the GSC Student Editor Nominations Committee, Janice Adelman, and to reviewers Elizabeth Johnson of the University of Michigan and Sara McClelland of CUNY for their help in reviewing the applications.

Teresa Robbins
Member-at-Large

SPSSI Student Funding Opportunities

In support of student research, SPSSI offers several funding opportunities for graduate students:

- **Clara Mayo Grants** are given in support of master's theses and pre-dissertation research on sexism, racism, and prejudice. For more information see [www.spssi.org/Mayoflyer.html](http://www.spssi.org/Mayoflyer.html)

- Graduate students are eligible for the **Grant-In-Aid Program** in support of research on social problems related to the goals of SPSSI. For more information see: [www.spssi.org/GIAflyer.html](http://www.spssi.org/GIAflyer.html)

- **Applied Social Issues Internship Program** provides funding for research conducted in cooperation with private and public organizations. For more information see: [www.spssi.org/ASIflyer.html](http://www.spssi.org/ASIflyer.html)

- **Social Issues Dissertation Award**. For more information, see: [www.spssi.org/Dissertationflyer.html](http://www.spssi.org/Dissertationflyer.html)

For more information on funding please visit our website at: [http://www.spssi.org/awards.html](http://www.spssi.org/awards.html)

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