We are very pleased to be able to offer a full complement of short papers from the Indigenous thematic group for this special edition of NEXUS. The papers reflect a developing level of engagement between our discipline and Indigenous issues. As convenors of the thematic group this engagement is something we see as not only important in terms of what sociology can offer within the fraught and often politically charged arena of Indigenous issues but an imperative for the discipline itself if we are to claim a significant, valid and worthwhile presence in Australian scholarship.

This special issue of NEXUS demonstrates how far the thematic group and TASA have come since our NEXUS article in October 2004 lamenting the absence of Indigenous-related work within Australian sociological scholarship. The following ‘Where is the sociology of Indigenous issues?’ workshop held in Beechworth in 2004 was the first Indigenous-specific event at TASA. The scarcity of Indigenous-related sociology meant papers at TASA conferences tended to be either incorporated within a specialist area such as health or bunched under the generic ‘Ethnic’ category. Since 2005, TASA has had stand-alone Indigenous thematic streams at each of its conferences and the joint New Zealand/Australian conference in Auckland in 2007 was notable for its strong Indigenous presence.

The papers included within this issue come from Indigenous and non-Indigenous sociologists and speak for themselves of the breadth of sociological relevance to Indigenous issues. While retaining, to some extent, an overt health theme, the papers come from different angles. Also, implicitly underpinning these papers is a central theme of power, and our discipline’s capacity to critically engage in the discourses, policies and practices of power relations. Zohl de Ishtar delves into the ‘treacherous borderlands’ of the Indigenous/dominant settler society interface encountered in her work assisting in the establishment of the Kapululangu Aboriginal and Women’s Law and Culture Centre. The paper from Priscilla Pyett reflects on sociology’s unique capacity to explore, explain and challenge the discourses, policies and practices around Indigenous health. Bill Genat and Shaun Ewen’s discussion of using interactive role play as a way of engaging health professionals in interrogating their own and their professions’ social, cultural, ethical and political location in relation to working with Indigenous peoples and issues also engages with sociology’s critical capacity. Kyllie Cripps directly tackles the loaded arena of Indigenous family violence questioning the capacity of mainstream services to respond adequately and appropriately. Maggie Walter and colleagues’ short overview of some recent developments and strategies for engaging Indigenous researcher capacity is aimed at informing and acting as a stimulus for building a stronger Indigenous researcher presence within our discipline. Finally, Heidi Neitz’s paper argues that, despite our late start, sociology is well placed to engage in strategic policy debates as they pertain to contemporary Indigenous issues using Indigenous adult education as her exemplar. As a final word, these papers bode well for a stimulating and scholarly Indigenous thematic stream at TASA Melbourne 2008.

Maggie Walter
Priscilla Pyett
Thematic Group Cordinators
Office Move
As many of you would now know, the TASA Office has moved from the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, to the Institute of Social Research at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne.

The reasons are practical. In recent years the Executive has invariably included key members located in Brisbane who provided support for the Executive Officer. This is no longer the case. The city most heavily represented on the Executive is now Melbourne. The resignation of our Executive Officer Noelle Hudson presented a dilemma in terms of managing the appointment and training a new Executive Officer. Our former Executive Officer Gabrielle Rowen-Clarke provided a temporary and serendipitous solution, between the births of her first and second born. In the longer run, we have resolved the dilemma by moving the office to Melbourne.

Moving has been a big job! Not least, we did not realise how much paper we had in this age of the ‘paperless office’—something in the region of 30 boxes! Moving is obviously not something we should do lightly. In the long run, we need to think about establishing a permanent office, staffed by more than one part-time administrator. That depends upon building a stronger income stream, grounded in more than one part-time administrator. That depends upon building a stronger income stream, grounded in more than one part-time administrator.

In the meantime, TASA is indebted to the School of Social Science at UQ for its hospitality since 2002. In particular, we are indebted to Professor Geoffrey Lawrence, Head of the School of Social Science, and Professor Zlatko Skribis, our former Vice President who has been responsible for much of the coordination between TASA and UQ.

I would also like to thank Gabrielle for filling in as Executive Officer for the past four months with her usual efficiency and good humour; and welcome our new Executive Officers, Sue Malta and Lee Glezos. Sue and Lee, both of them postgraduates at Swinburne, are job sharing the Executive Officer position. At the moment they are busy setting up the office and working their way through their new responsibilities with impressive efficiency and enthusiasm. Please be patient as they learn the ropes!

Sociology at ANU
Many Sociology Departments in Australian universities struggled in the 1990s and early 2000s as universities cut back their Social Science and Humanities programs. They included some of the largest departments in Australia, once pioneers and leaders of the discipline. There are now signs that this process is turning around — nowhere more so than in the College of Arts and Social Sciences (incorporating the Research School of Social Sciences and the Faculty) at the Australian National University.

In July, I was invited in my capacity as TASA President to attend a Sociology Planning Forum at the College as an External Observer. The purpose of the Forum was to take stock of Sociology at ANU, and explore how it might concentrate its activities in order to regenerate the discipline and raise its profile — in Australia and overseas.

ANU was a pioneer in the formation of Sociology in Australia, and the birthplace of organised Sociology, including TASA and the Journal of Sociology. In the 1960s and 1970s it was especially well known for its large-scale quantitative surveys and influential work on immigration and multiculturalism. Since then ANU’s profile in Australian Sociology has languished, not least on account of substantial staff cutbacks. It is symptomatic that a TASA conference has not been held in Canberra since the 1980s.

The Forum was a fascinating exercise, which attracted about 30 academics — not all of them sociologists — and stimulated vigorous discussion. At the end of the day, the consensus of the meeting arrived at two possible areas of concentration: crime and justice, and sociology of the environment. In the crime and justice field, ANU has an established international reputation, notably through RegNet. In the sociology of the environment, there is rich potential on account of strong links between Sociology and the Fenner School of Environment and Society, and the policy relevance of the field.

Since then, the College has advertised 5 positions in Sociology, from Lecturer to Professor. Clearly it is serious about rebuilding the discipline at ANU — which is great news for Australian sociology at large!

Thematic groups
We now have 16 Thematic Groups (TGs) in TASA. This year we have three new ones: Families, relationships and gender; Critical disability studies; and Science, technology and knowledge. Meantime, the older TGs are approaching the end of their third year, reaching the point where they must consider their futures, and perhaps a change of leadership.

New Terms of Reference for TGs — canvassed among the TGs at last year’s TASA Conference and approved by the TASA Executive earlier this year — will make available modest financial support on a routine basis, proportionate to the number of members in the Group. At the same time, new conditions of membership will encourage TASA members to be more discriminating about signing up for
The 2008 Conference of The Australian Sociological Association

Re-imagining Sociology

2-5 December 2008

The University of Melbourne

The 2008 TASA conference will provide a forum for re-imagining the contribution of sociology in engaging with major emerging social issues in a period of rapid global transformation. Contemporary societal transformations require innovative responses from sociology, in terms of the theoretical and methodological tools used, and in exploring creative ways to engage actively with the world. The conference theme is deliberately broad, and we invite papers and abstracts, and proposals for conference innovations, from all who are interested in contributing to the process of re-imagining sociology.

Call for Papers and Abstracts OPENS 10 March 2008
Registration OPENS 10 March 2008
Paper Submission CLOSES 28 July 2008
Abstract Submission CLOSES 29 September 2008
Early Bird Registration CLOSES 13 October 2008

TGs, discouraging passive membership. TGs will need to take the new Terms of Reference into account when they consider their futures.

I am currently signed up for no less than 5 TGs, but have been most involved in the Economic Sociology TG. I was one of the founding conveners, with Malcolm Alexander. At the 2007 TASA Conference the TG had its first leadership transition. The new coordinating team consisted of three postgraduates — Dina Bowman from Swinburne (who has since completed her PhD), Peta Freestone from the University of Melbourne (who has since been elected as Postgraduate representative on the TASA Executive) and Lee Glezos (who has since become an Executive Officer of TASA).

The new conveners have recently published an online newsletter, called Exchange. The newsletter includes a fascinating Q&A with Ross Gittins, the Economics Editor for the Sydney Morning Herald. It also includes contributions from economic sociologists around Australia, including postgraduates. I am biased — but I think it is a fantastic effort, providing a possible model for other TGs. To check it out, go to: http://www.economicsociology.org.au/newsletters/exchange-issue1.pdf.

The interview with Gittins had an unexpected effect. Gittins asked Lee Glezos, his interviewer, for some examples of economic sociology. Lee sent him 3 foundation articles in the field. Gittins promptly wrote an article entitled ‘Economics through the eyes of a sociologist’, which can be found at: http://business.smh.com.au/economics-through-the-eyes-of-a-sociologist-20080606-2n0d.html?page=fullpage#contentSwap2

Perhaps other TGs should consider installing postgraduates as their conveners, and other postgraduates should consider stepping up to the position. The process has certainly reinvigorated the Economic Sociology TG!

Michael Gilding
President, TASA
A TIMELY ENCOUNTER FOR SOCIOLOGICAL EXPERTISE:
Identifying Strategic Policy Directions for Increased and Sustained Indigenous Adult Educational Outcomes

Heidi Nietz

How Sociology Can Secure its Place in Contemporary Indigenous Affairs
It is a timely encounter for sociologists to begin imagining their place in debates about the delivery of increased educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians given the current Rudd Government’s commitment to ‘closing the gap’ 1 of disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In the adult education sector alone, Indigenous Australians are less likely to complete their secondary schooling, and less likely to enrol and complete degree programs in comparison to non-Indigenous Australians (HREOC 2006). 2

It is also a timely encounter for sociologists to recognise the value that their technical, rational, expertise can play in the policy-making arena. This is an important strategic concern given Altman’s (2007) diagnosis of the former Howard Government’s concerted efforts to wreck havoc with the social sciences and their ability to generate informed, social commentary and policy advice. Central to Altman’s diagnosis is the claim that the government of the day was restricting academic freedom and therefore was waging ‘influence wars’ which sought to silence social scientific enquiry as it related to public policy in Indigenous affairs. The defunding of research institutes which were seen to be critical of the government’s new arrangements highlights one of several mechanisms that control the type of debate in the public domain.

Altman’s diagnosis can be read broadly as questioning the politics of governmentalisation, in the Foucauldian 3 sense, that instantiated a quite specific agenda for the rationalisation of Indigenous service and program delivery. The vast array of techniques deployed to calculate, evaluate and monitor the sustainability of Indigenous communities rested upon a desire to mainstream services and programs and to contract Indigenous communities to become active participants in the provision and sustainability of services in partnership with the layers of government. It is argued here that the logic of partnerships did not inadvertently assist communities to become ‘politically’ active in their own right, and according to their own terms of reference (read: self-determination). Rather, partnerships provided government with the means to intervene to create ‘shared responsibilities’ 4 which aimed to bring communities into active participation and, in doing so, draw them into mainstream Australian society.

It is worth noting here that Indigenous health and education had always been mainstreamed during the years of operation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) 5. Under that period of mainstreaming, Indigenous educational programs did not achieve sustainable outcomes. This two-fold historical, seemingly contradictory, administrative mentality may be of interest to sociologists. In the first instance, as a modus operandi, it offers sociologists the opportunity to recognise the value of their disciplinary expertise and importantly shape the strategic directions capable of their expertise in the policy-making arena. In the second instance, it has always been sociology’s disciplinary ambit to diagnose the conditions of modern life, and the problem of democratic governance viz-a-viz the right to full participation. The problem here is one that rests upon the belief in the freedom of all individuals to participate equally in modern life. What we find, however, is that liberal theorising is necessarily thwarted because it is premised upon a restriction that, as Smith (1990: 209) argues, ‘defies the terms of freedom and universality that constitutes liberal explanation itself’. The terms of liberal theorising thus pertain to an account of modern life that is available for some but not all. Those who are excluded are positioned outside of these conditions; enhancing the techniques of government and subjecting them to an ever increasingly pervasive form of technical and rational administrative mentality (Dean 1996). There is thus an inherent conflict within the liberal belief of the freedom for all individuals to participate equally in modern life.

Enter Sociologists
In the wake of a series of critical challenges waged consistently over the last two decades by post-colonial thinkers, and in the transformation of sociology’s research agenda from a conception of ‘the social’ to ‘the global’, sociologists have responded by engaging in an ongoing critical evaluation of the discipline and its developments 6 (Nietz 1997). In doing so, sociology, firstly, has become repositioned as a reflexive practice, one which takes up a conception of modern life as inherently reflexive and makes itself part of this reflexivity. This requires sociology to make itself part of its own subject matter in order to claim the analytical capacity to engage in that life (Nietz 1997). Secondly, its transformed research agenda recognises the world wide diversity of cultures within the global domain which makes sociology susceptible to the challenges waged by post-colonial thinkers; in particular, the challenges waged against liberal theorising and western epistemologies.

Enter Aileen Moreton-Robertson: an Indigenous academic who invites sociology to consider a new research agenda 7. While her invitation is pitched specifically in terms of thinking about Indigenous sovereignty in a different way, the broader scope of her argument addresses liberal theorising by way of her inclusion of the ‘critical Whiteness
literatures’. The premise of Moreton-Robertson’s (2006, 383) argument rests upon a challenge for sociologists to develop a ‘sociological imagination’ which will permit them ‘to think beyond the temple of one’s familiar to examine the social world in new and unfamiliar ways’. Invoking the popularity of C. Wright Mills’ (1959) phrase of the ‘sociological imagination’, a methodology which guides sociological practice, Moreton-Robertson squarely questions the manner in which sociology has responded to the presence of Indigenous knowledges in the fashioning of sociological practice. Given sociology’s conception of an inclusive unit of inquiry which is predicated upon contested and plural definitions of modern life, Moreton-Robertson can be read to quite cleverly hold sociology to account for the terms of its exclusion of Indigenous knowledges.

With Moreton-Robertson’s challenge in mind, it is argued here that sociology is well placed to respond positively to such challenges because the very terms of its practice, the open-ended conception of disciplinary knowledge, enables it to engender contests over meaning. By embracing such challenges, sociology is afforded the opportunity to keep its practice contemporary and its expertise relevant to the issues of the day.

**Putting Sociological Insights into Practice**

I have an established educationalist history as a mainstream sociology lecturer and, over the past nine years or so, have undertaken tutoring in the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) across the social sciences at a number of Australian universities. Most recently, I have worked for two Indigenous community-controlled organisations in central Australia delivering on educational outcomes in both the VET and tertiary Foundation Studies sectors. Through my professional travels, as a non-Indigenous educator, it has been my desire to engage reflexively with teaching and learning processes adopted in the various educational settings I have found myself. During these travels, I have often observed the sorts of issues Indigenous students have encountered in the mainstream tertiary sector, their impressions of their mainstream educators, and some of the responses their educators have had when Indigenous students question some of the orthodoxies of critical analysis. My experiences in community-controlled educational organisations have been a variation on these thematic concerns: same difference. In all settings, I believe that many of the barriers in teaching and learning are borne of fear from Indigenous students and non-Indigenous educators alike.

In the first instance, with regards to the experiences of Indigenous students, sociology can be ready to actively develop curriculum and teaching and learning methodologies that engage Indigenous students in a way that does not disadvantage them with regards to assessment criteria. The challenge here is how to harness the knowledges brought to class by students and how to value that knowledge in the transmission of more formal ways of knowing. It has been my observation that Indigenous students have to learn ‘double time’—that is, whilst maintaining respect for their own traditions, their own understanding of the historical forces shaping Australian society, and dealing with offensive references to their lived experiences encoded in concepts such as ‘Indigenous disadvantage’ and/or statistical measures which are somehow expected to reflect the richness of their experiences, they are also required to learn new knowledges that do not always reflect conflicts of interpretation. My argument, in the first instance, therefore is about contested knowledges and the idea that knowledge is always in the process of being made/negotiated when it involves people from different cultural traditions.

This is a challenge sociologists are equipped to deal with in their research on teaching and learning methodologies, and in their practice. Sociology has the skill base to identify how teaching and learning across cultures involves an active relationship of building knowledges. By this I mean, I have often seen the enthusiasm of students thwarted whilst they are asked to rote learn the concepts and traditions of western knowledge. While learning these traditions has a place in student learning more often than not non-Indigenous educators do not realise that these concepts are encoded with quite specific value orientations about what counts as ‘true’ knowledge. As a result, when a student is courageous enough to persevere in questioning the terms of reference, they risk embarrassment because they have to answer to stereotypes of Aboriginal people being hostile to ‘white society’ or they feel shamed in challenging the perceived authority of their educators.

To this end, and in the second instance, greater attention needs to be given to the issues non-Indigenous educators may have in their teaching practices. From my observations, I believe non-Indigenous educators may be too afraid to have a flexible approach to their own knowledge practices (given our own feelings of insecurity about our mastery of western knowledge). Thus we tend to be slaves to intellectual traditions unquestioningly and in doing so inadvertently silence questions Indigenous students bring to intellectual orthodoxies. This teaching and learning context becomes problematic when we want the best for students.
but are ourselves powerless to find a way to do so. Often
the ready solution has been to ‘dumb-down’ teaching
and learning outcomes, to get students through the best
way we can. However, this solution sets up an expectation
of failure; whereby any outcome which brings Indigenous
students across the assessment line is considered better than
dealing with the problem of absolute failure to complete.
In the worse case scenario, when best intentions are
exhausted, Indigenous students are left to repeat courses
and/or withdraw.

The powerful work undertaken by Sarra (2003; 2005; 2007)
during his time at Cherbourg State School, and subsequently
in founding the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute,
identifies the impossibility of this situation in achieving
increased outcomes for Indigenous students. While Sarra
bases his work in the schooling sector, I believe there are
lessons to be learned from his approach; lessons that
translate well to the adult education sectors. Like him, I also
believe that creating a teaching and learning environment
of high expectations is paramount to increased educational
outcomes. It is also paramount to valuing contests over
knowledge as a means of building more effective teaching
and learning relationships.

For Indigenous students, this approach may be a
welcomed relief because it values the richness of their
cultural heritage and allows them to speak of the historical
forces that have impacted upon their heritage. For non-
Indigenous educators, this approach may also offer us
the vantage point from which to work through our fears,
predictions, differences and entertain the notion of undoing
‘white-ness’, of not having to know it all. A reading of
Stoler’s (1995) Race and the Education of Desire
identifies the impossibility of this situation in achieving
increased outcomes for Indigenous students. While Sarra
bases his work in the schooling sector, I believe there are
lessons to be learned from his approach; lessons that
translate well to the adult education sectors. Like him, I also
believe that creating a teaching and learning environment
of high expectations is paramount to increased educational
outcomes. It is also paramount to valuing contests over
knowledge as a means of building more effective teaching
and learning relationships.

All of this reflexive questioning takes time and patience but
it is a timely encounter for sociologists to ‘step up’ to the
challenge.

**A Timely Redirection for Strategic Sociological Expertise: A
Concluding Remark on Policy-making**

My elaboration on sociological practice and its place in
policy-making for Indigenous educational outcomes fleshes
out the terms of practice that sociology is well-versed in,
and claims as its modus operandi. In sociology’s claim to
reflexivity, it is fundamentally situated within a practice
that involves work on oneself and responding to one’s own
time (Nietz 1997). Work on oneself is part of the way one
responds to one’s own time, since this work always involves
an account of the structures, processes and events which
define one’s relationship to the present. This being so, and
if the current federal government charge is to increase the
number of Indigenous students pursuing teacher education
pathways, and if the government adopts Noel Pearson’s
(2007) directives to send in qualified non-Indigenous
teachers to remote communities to redress numeracy and
literacy rates, then sociologists have an important role to
play. In particular, sociologists play an important role in
facilitating that training and in conducting research on the
issues that will emerge when non-remote trained educators
are required to perform according to national benchmarks
in regions that are resource poor and have a history of
interrupted teaching and learning outcomes.

Heidi Nietz

Endnotes
1 For a more detailed discussion of this policy redirection, see Alt-
2 The Vocational and Educational Training (VET) sector remains
the primary pathway for Indigenous Australians to access post-
schooling education and training (HREOC 2006). According to
Young et al (2007), VET services to Indigenous people struggle to
meet expressed demand and relevance. The emerging trend ap-
pears to be increased social and economic exclusion and, even
after participation in VET programs, decreasing pathways into
work or meaningful study.
3 See, for example, the series of articles in Burchell et al (1991) The
Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality.
4 See, for example, McClausland R (2005) Shared Responsibility
Agreements: Progress to Date.
5 TSIC was originally set up as a representational body for decision-
making and public administration. It compromised both a service
delivery arm governed by the greater Australian Public Service Act
and an elected board (see Hannaford et al 2003; Special Edition
6 In my doctorate, entitled Practising Sociology, I argued that the
terms of self-critical checking facilitates transformative renewal and
thereby secures sociology’s ontological necessity (Nietz 1997).
7 Moreton-Robertson’s critical agenda by no means stands as the
sole challenge to western epistemologies. Rather it is because of
her attempt to ‘stimulate sociological thinking’ as practice that
determines its authoritative weight for sociological debate (Moreton-Robertson 2006: 383; see also Rigney 1997; Smith 1999; Butler-McIlwraith 2006; Martin 2008, among others).

8 ITAS, funded currently by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), runs across the schooling, further education and higher education sectors. In terms of the latter, ITAS tutors provide additional tuition in support of students’ mainstream classes. For the policy requirements of ITAS provision, see www.deewr.gov.au).

References


STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS RESEARCH CULTURE
Maggie Walter, John Maynard, Jilli Milroy and Martin Nakata

IHEAC Research Directions
The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) provides policy advice to Government, and currently reports directly to the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. All authors of this paper are members of IHEAC.

One of IHEAC’s key aims is to strengthen Indigenous research with Australian universities. Fundamentally, we want to bring Indigenous research from the margins into the core of academic research culture and affirm its place and prominence within higher education. To do this we need to increase the recognition of Indigenous research within the prevailing academic research paradigm, establish the unique facets and contribution of quality Indigenous research, and dramatically increase both the number and capacity of Indigenous researchers. This aim is a long way from current realities. Although there are positive instances within individual universities, on the whole, the arena is marked by ad hoc measures and an absence of long term planning.

IHEAC has identified three key goals for strengthening and enhancing Indigenous research culture and capacity within Australian universities. These are outlined within this paper as well as Council’s proposed strategic initiative to achieve these goals: a National Indigenous Centre of Research Excellence.

Goal 1: Enhance Indigenous research within the University Sector
The first goal seeks a greater prioritisation, support and development for Indigenous research via two linked strategies. First is a call for an institutional commitment to the development of a specific and concrete Indigenous research strategy at each Australian university. We acknowledge that some universities already have Indigenous research strategies in place. However, a national expectation of a specific, institutionally-based Indigenous research capacity activity is needed to provide strategic coherence and sustainable programs. At the same time institutional diversity needs to co-exist within a national expectation.

Second, to overcome marginalisation, responsibility for Indigenous research development must be situated with a position of institutional power. High level placement enables Indigenous research to be formally recognised and institutionally embedded in academic research practice. This include the priorities and precursors of Indigenous research such as the consideration of Indigenous communities at all levels of the research, especially at setting standards for ethical research practices in Indigenous contexts; the development of cultural and community protocols and practices to guide researchers (Indigenous and non-Indigenous); the significance of research outcomes to benefit Indigenous communities; and the need for researchers to be trained in Indigenous cultural sensitivities and methodologies. Moreover, a senior Indigenous research appointment acknowledges to the institution, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, Indigenous communities and funding bodies, universities’ commitment to building and supporting Indigenous research. Such high level recognition of the importance and specific place of Indigenous research also increase the likelihood of community research connections and partnerships across Australia and internationally.

Goal 2: To Increase Indigenous Post-Graduate Enrolments and Completions
The second goal focuses on increasing Indigenous post-graduate achievement. There is an obvious and urgent need to raise the number of Indigenous researchers. Indigenous students make up less than 0.4 percent of PhD completions (DEST 2007a). To achieve population size parity, the number of Indigenous doctoral students needs to more than triple and completions need to increase by more than 600 percent. The task is formidable. Increasing the number of Indigenous research post-graduate students is not just a matter of getting more enrolments. Although we clearly need significantly more Indigenous undergraduate students to desire and commit to post-graduate studies we also need to focus on quality of outcomes. There are considerable risks inherent in fast-tracking indigenous students through their studies. Indigenous post-graduates, as do all post-graduates, require adequate time and training to develop and master key research skills.

Again, we acknowledge the existence of some Indigenous research programs. The Research Mentor program for Indigenous women at the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW is an example. Others include the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences’ (ASSA) Summer School for Indigenous post-graduate students, held at the University of Melbourne and the recent Indigenous Research Methodologies Master Class held at QUT. Such programs provide vital academic and research skills and support and networking opportunities for Indigenous post-graduates from around Australia as well as providing support and guidance for non-Indigenous researchers and supervisors. Overall, however, the sector wide commitment to, and program implementation of support for Indigenous research heretofore tend to be ad hoc, often short term, with success and innovation not specifically rewarded. Conversely, lack of success is sanctioned.
**Goal 3: Building capacity and opportunities for Indigenous researchers**

The number and research capacity of Indigenous academic staff also requires significant attention. Making up 0.65 percent of academic staff, Indigenous numbers are only about one quarter their population parity rate. The proportion of Indigenous academic staff increased very gradually from 2000-2005, but dropped in 2006 before stabilising in 2007 (DEST 2007b). Even if we disregard the drop in 2006, on the average rate of increase across the last 5 years it will take about 87 years for Indigenous academics to proportionally reflect the 2.3 percent of the Australian population who are Indigenous (ABS 2007). We obviously cannot rely on, or wait for, a pipeline effect. Closer examinations of the data by function reveal even deeper disparities. Parity in the research-only area would require a more than 800 percent increase, while for teaching only positions an extra seven positions would achieve parity.

**Achieving the Goals: An Indigenous Centre of Research Excellence**

Council considers the pathway towards a stronger and sustainable future is via the development of a vigorous, broad-based and linked Indigenous higher education infrastructure. This infrastructure would bring together and streamline existing support structures, resources and expertise as well as developing other vital elements. The principal purpose is to facilitate, in a structured and cohesive way, the place and recognition of Indigenous knowledges, the capacity engagement of Indigenous researchers, and the building of a sustainable Indigenous academic workforce. A foundational element of this infrastructure is an Indigenous Centre of Research Excellence (ICRE). The Federal Government has provided funding for a scoping study into an ICRE (due December 2008).

Council’s vision is of a skilled Indigenous research workforce to lead an Indigenous research agenda on projects that improve the life options and outcomes for Australian Indigenous peoples. To do this Council envisages that ICRE will expand Indigenous and national research capability by building the culture of research among Indigenous students and academics and dramatically increase the number and rate of Indigenous post-graduate enrolments and completions. Towards this vision the Centre has twin primary purposes, each with a range of suggested ICRE related range of activities:

1. Building Indigenous research capacity
2. Building Indigenous research leadership within Australian universities.

**Developing Indigenous Research Capacity**

- Draw on Indigenous and western knowledge systems to train emerging researchers in robust and adaptable research skills and research practice
- Run undergraduate to post-graduate transition programs (that is, research internships)
- Conduct workshops around key research activities: thesis and journal article writing; developing research proposals; writing a book proposal
- Co-ordinate mentoring programs of Indigenous post-graduates
- Provide a central (website) hub for information on Indigenous research opportunities (that is, post-graduate scholarships, post-doctoral fellowships, national and international research opportunities)
- Provide seed funding to facilitate development of a viable research proposals
- Foster research opportunities for our post-graduate and post-doctoral scholars

**Fostering Indigenous Research Leadership**

- Initiate opportunities for Indigenous researchers to work collaboratively
- Develop an accessible register for Indigenous research expertise
- Collaborate with competitive funding groups to encourage quality research projects that address an Indigenous research agenda
- Build formal relationships with international Indigenous Research Centres
- Collaborate with Universities Australia and other key organisations to develop a national Indigenous research strategy within the university sector
- Provide support and advice to higher educational institutions to develop intra-university support programs and strategies for their Indigenous researchers.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange between Indigenous researchers and end users of our research
- Identify research priorities of critical importance to Indigenous Australia

The ICRE is proposed as a discrete body, operating collaboratively with, but outside the boundaries of, existing Indigenous Centres. It will be virtual and dispersed with the Executive Director and secretariat within a (competitively selected) host institution. ICRE governance will be determined by its constitution and by a Board tasked with guiding and monitoring the Centre’s activities and operational directions. Universities will be invited to be ICRE participating research entities with groups of Indigenous researchers nominating to develop research hubs around specialised themes.
The key role of this Centre, to build Indigenous research capacity, networks and leadership sector wide, is fundamentally different to existing bodies. It will not replicate or usurp the activities of existing organisations such as AIATSIS or the CRC Aboriginal Health or the proposed United Nations University of Traditional Knowledge in the Northern Territory. For example, the ICRE will not sponsor research directly but will facilitate the submission of quality research proposals from Indigenous researchers. The ICRE’s core research focus will incorporate ‘closing the gap’ themes of social inclusion, economic opportunities and educational transformation. Within this vision is a commitment to excellence and to providing valuable, tangible returns to funding bodies, Australian universities, Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities.

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Authors’ Note
This article draws on a paper ‘Strengthening Indigenous Research Culture’, by the same authors, presented at the Ngapartji Ngapartji -Yerra: Stronger Futures IHEAC Annual Conference 2007.

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Agenda for Social Justice, Solutions 2008

The SSSP is pleased to offer the Agenda for Social Justice, Solutions 2008, which represents an effort by our professional association to nourish a more “public sociology” that will be easily accessible and useful to policy makers. We hope that you find it helpful in your challenging work of crafting successful solutions to contemporary social problems.

The Agenda for Social Justice, Solutions 2008 addresses a variety of social problems in three sections: global issues, Americans at risk, and health & welfare. This is an effort on the part of scholars at the Society for the Study of Social Problems to disseminate the findings in social problems research.

More information on the project is available at www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/323. You can download the full version, and you can link directly to the one-page briefs and individual chapters. The chapters are available for free download, and may be suitable as cost-effective supplementary readings in many social problems-related courses.
As a sociologist working as a public health researcher in the area of Indigenous health, I wanted to use this special issue of Nexus to reflect on what sociology can offer Indigenous health. This reflection draws on the work and thinking I have done over the past five years in collaboration with my colleague Peter Waples-Crowe at the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.

In my work in Indigenous health research over the past eight years, I have tried to bring to this area some of the critical insights of a sociological imagination. In particular - and without much need for imagination, since the statistics provide glaring evidence of the gross inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across all aspects of social, economic and political life - sociology's insights into what are known in epidemiology as the 'social determinants of health' (SDOH). The World Health Organisation (WHO) established a Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) in March 2005 and their final report, which will include recommendations for action, should be published later this year (according to their website www.who.int/social_determinants/en/).

While we can trace the SDOH agenda back to the 1974 Lalonde Report in Canada, the ‘Black Report’ in the UK in 1980, and the Ottawa Charter in 1986, according to the Lalonde Report in Canada, the ‘Black Report’ in the UK in 1980, and the Ottawa Charter in 1986, the Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) in March 2005 and their final report, which will include recommendations for action, should be published later this year (according to their website www.who.int/social_determinants/en/).

While we can trace the SDOH agenda back to the 1974 Lalonde Report in Canada, the ‘Black Report’ in the UK in 1980, and the Ottawa Charter in 1986, according to the WHO Commissioners ‘[t]he specific vocabulary of SDOH came into increasingly wide use in the mid 1990s’ (CSDH 2005:23). Two recent publications by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have focused on the SDOH for Indigenous Australians, drawing on work from a wide range of disciplines (Anderson, Baum and Bentley 2007; Carson, Dunbar and Chenhall 2007).

While the SDOH are clearly recognised as important factors in inequalities of health, it seems to me that public health researchers, practitioners and policy-makers struggling with the seemingly intractable problem of improving Indigenous health constantly fall back on the old issues – calling for more and better health services, cultural competence and cultural awareness training for service providers, better access to services for Indigenous populations, or more screening and preventive measures. These are all very important issues, particularly in light of the critical need to address the high levels of chronic illness in the Indigenous population, but none of these strategies address poverty, unemployment, poor housing, low levels of education, high rates of imprisonment, the prevalence of violence and alcohol abuse in the everyday social environment of many Indigenous communities, the frequency with which Indigenous people encounter racism on a daily basis, and so on. These are the SDOH for our Indigenous population (Anderson et al. 2007; Carson et al. 2007).

The new Australian Federal government has adopted the catchy slogan from the OXFAM campaign with the important target of ‘closing the gap’ between the life expectancy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, currently estimated at 17-20 years. To do this, the government and their policy-makers, the bureaucrats and the service providers will need to look for ways of addressing all the gaps in the social determinants. Such an approach would be welcomed by Australia’s Indigenous population who, like many of their Indigenous counterparts across the world, have a holistic view of health. The social aspects of health are integral to Indigenous peoples’ spiritual, emotional and physical well-being. The National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party (1989: x) defined health as ‘not just the physical well-being of the individual, but the social, emotional, and cultural well-being of the whole community. This is a whole-of-life view and it also includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life’. Thus, for Aboriginal people health is ‘a matter of determining all aspects of their life, including control over their physical environment, of dignity, of community self-esteem, and of justice. It is not merely a matter of the provision of doctors, hospitals, medicines or the absence of disease and incapacity’ (NAHSWP, 1989: ix).

In 2003 an editorial in the British Medical Journal on the health of Indigenous peoples by a leading Maori academic noted that ‘while access to quality health care is important, socioeconomic and macro-political interventions may have greater potential for improving the health status of Indigenous peoples’ (Durie 2003:511). As sociologists, we cannot directly address these multiple causes of health inequality except through research and theorising. However, some of sociology’s strengths lie in the discipline’s proud history of tackling issues from a social justice perspective, analysing and theorising power relations, and understanding the context of people’s lived realities. To respect Indigenous values and ethics means collaborating, consulting, including and informing Indigenous people in our research and theorising. As researchers we can utilise collaborative and participatory research methods which empower Indigenous people through having increased control of the research agenda and the processes of research. We can try to build research capacity among Indigenous colleagues and students, sharing knowledge and skills, encouraging active participation in the research project and in the analysis of data and dissemination of findings, and we can acknowledge our Indigenous co-researchers in publications, preferably as authors and as co-presenters at conferences. We can work across all areas of social, economic and political life, researching education or racism, police practices and the criminal justice system, poverty and unemployment, as well as how to reduce smoking or alcohol and other drug use, or increase physical activity and physical well-being.
REFLECTING ON A ROLE FOR SOCIOLOGY IN INDIGENOUS HEALTH

(Cont.)

healthy eating, and we can use existing data to analyse inequalities and discriminatory policies and practices. We can document the successful programs that work across all these social determinants, including the success of Aboriginal community-controlled health, legal and other social service organisations and individual programs (see, for example, Fletcher 2007).

As sociologists we are well placed to critique the structures of Australian society and their impact on Indigenous Australians’ health at the macro level, and to critique policies that impact on Indigenous Australians’ health and make recommendations for change. We can critique ourselves as sociologists – our discipline, our methods, our theories, our processes (Connell 2007) – and change the way we ‘do’ sociology (Butler-McIlwraith 2006). For those of us involved in teaching sociology we can interrogate our teaching to include Indigenous issues in all aspects of Australian society. And we can all apply our sociological thinking to practical grass-roots solutions addressing issues at the micro level.

We can also work with Indigenous colleagues to ensure that we contribute an Indigenous perspective; and we can use, challenge and change established sociological theories and methods and incorporate Indigenous methodologies and ways of thinking. We need to ‘develop a framework of enquiry that is more inclusive of Indigenous perspectives and therefore more capable of achieving an understanding of Indigenous Australian social realities’ (Walter, Pyett et al. 2006:342). Sociologists are usually comfortable in multidisciplinary collaborations, using sociological tools for measurement and evaluation, analysis and interpretation, and we can bring these sets of skills together to build a stronger evidence base for understanding the causal pathways to health inequalities. If the Prime Minister is calling on Australians to ‘close the gap’, I guess I’m calling on sociologists to think about how we can contribute, in however small a way, to this important endeavour.

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References


TEACHING ABORIGINAL HEALTH AND HISTORY:
The Use of Interactive Role-Play

Bill Genat and Shaun Ewen

Ensuring equity in the health system through interventions that promote the health of disadvantaged groups is a central recognised tenet of public health practice (NPHP 2002: 27). Though, not as well-recognised are the related challenges for public health educators. Enhancing skills and understanding regarding equity in public health requires the development of quite sophisticated and strategic teaching and learning materials. Because many public health students are already qualified health practitioners with substantial experience, well-crafted teaching and learning materials that challenge some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of professional practice are necessary. While equity questions are relevant to a wide range of publics, none are more challenging for European-Australian students than issues regarding Indigenous Australian health.

A thorny problem within the teaching of Aboriginal health is how to challenge students to critically analyse the abundant social commentary and political discourse that is used to frame observer and practitioner understandings regarding Indigenous public health challenges. The teaching task becomes even more complex with the knowledge that the history and culture of some professional health groups in Australia are tainted through a range of harmful attitudes and practices towards Indigenous Australians and their health (Hunter 1991; Rasmussen 2001). How to strengthen the awareness and self-reflexivity of public health professionals in their responses to Indigenous Australians remains a key question. To what extent are public health practitioners able to fearlessly interrogate their professional practice and situate themselves within their own personal, historical, ethical, social, cultural and political location, recognise its influences on their work and use it to challenge popular discourses that exacerbate existing health differentials further? While such self-reflexive practice may enable public health professionals to go well beyond a banal and instrumental form of ‘cultural competence’, it is unlikely to be at all sustainable in the absence of supportive, like-minded colleagues with a similar penchant for critical inquiry in relation to their own Indigenous public health practice.

‘Koori Wellbeing at Coranderrk: an online interactive role-play’ aims to strengthen the capacity of public health professionals in social and cultural analysis regarding Indigenous health disadvantage (Anderson, Brabham, Genat, Jessen & Fitzgerald, 2004). The role-play is utilised within the Victorian Consortium of Public Health (VCPH) 1, Master of Public Health (MPH) program, the Melbourne School of Population Health, Master of Social Health (MSH) program, and in an international teaching collaboration with the University of British Columbia by the Onemda Vic Health Koori Health Unit at The University of Melbourne. It developed as a component of the Public Health Education and Research Program (PHERP) Innovations Project on Indigenous Public Health Curricula Development that identified a range of gaps in MPH curricula nationally regarding Indigenous public health education, in particular, the necessity of student engagement with Aboriginal health and history 2.

Our online multimedia role-play provides an opportunity for postgraduate students to learn collaboratively with their colleagues and to ‘walk in the shoes’ of public health policy-makers, advocates, local leaders and consumers. Because the impact of history shapes the social determinants of Aboriginal health, the role-play is based on actual historical characters and events. Students engage with actual archival materials and enact a historical character from an unfamiliar time and place and engage with other contemporary historical characters. In doing so, they gain an understanding of the social context of Indigenous public health, the dynamics of settler-Aboriginal relations and, importantly, insight into the contemporary resonances of these relationships operating in Indigenous public health today.

The Role-Play

This multimedia role-play is set at Coranderrk Aboriginal Settlement established in 1863 at Healesville, fifty kilometres from Melbourne in Victoria. It involves six historical characters: a Kulin leader, a Koori Householder, an Ally of the Kulin in their struggle, the Coranderrk Manager, the Secretary of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines and the local Member (for Evelyn) of the Legislative Assembly. The establishment of Coranderrk as a refuge for the Kulin on their own country subsequent to their own representations to government after the preceding 30 years of continuous displacement and their subsequent struggle to retain it generated a substantial public archive.

The archive includes perspectives of settlers, officials and the Kulin and their allies in the form of letters, photographs, newspaper articles, public letters to the editor, transcribed testimony from three public inquiries, and Aborigines Protection Board reports, minutes and correspondence. It is from these archives that the role-play characters and their personalities emerge. Other historical materials that document the mid-nineteenth century goldrush in Victoria contextualise the role-play interaction and describe colonial economy and commerce, institutions, leisure, popular representations of the ‘Other’, the geography of the region and contemporary observations of the Kulin.
The historical materials inform the actions of the role-play characters. Within the role-play the characters correspond with each other, convene and attend public meetings via a bulletin board, write and respond to letters in the newspaper, make or receive representations to Government and caucus with their allies to respond to particular events.

A powerful attribute of the role-play content are the contemporary resonances of both the administrative responses to the situation at the settlement and the agency and resilience displayed the Aboriginal residents. Administrative representations of the Kulin that resonate in the contemporary Aboriginal health context include observations by public officials about the capacity of Aboriginal Australians to take responsibility. For example from Richard Heales, Chairman of the Central Board to Watch over the Interests of Aborigine in 1862:

> The Board wish that they could say that there has been a marked change in the mode of living and habits of the blacks – that they entertain a hope that this people will gradually adopt some of the employments of the white race, and develop those instincts out of which grow steady application, and realisation of the gains of labours - that they will become conscious of the responsibilities which belong to every, even the lowest, condition of the life of man, and at length cease to be a burden on the country (1862: 14, emphasis added)

Similarly, from ex-Prime Minister John Howard quoted in The Australian, 6 December 2004:

> The answer lies in finding solutions . . . [that] instil a greater sense of responsibility in parents and Aboriginal leaders (2004: 1, emphasis added)

and, quoted in The Age on 31 May 2005:

> The way out . . . is for local communities to accept personal responsibility for their own actions (2005, emphasis added)

The Coranderrk experiment in the 1860s and interplay of politics provides a fascinating example of early settler/Aboriginal relations with many contemporary reverberations. By bringing this historical context to life, public health professionals walk in the shoes of both the colonisers and the colonised and gain fundamental insights into the underlying assumptions and origins of the culture of public policy making concerning Aboriginal Australians and how it continues to erode progress addressing the social determinants of Aboriginal health. The parallels are considerable, despite the passage of nearly 150 years of time.

The advances in online technology provide an engaging learning environment for student interaction. However, the extent to which physical distance may or may not optimise role-play as a learning technology at this stage is unclear. The technology itself provides an enhanced mode for delivery for what was a quite dense historical and anthropological reference work (Barwick 1998). Now, previously difficult to access primary historical resources are available at the click of a button for students engaged in the subject. The teaching package encourages students to utilise both synchronous and asynchronous interactive options connecting the characters from the 1860s with their re-incarnated lives in cyberspace. This model of public health learning and critical inquiry lends itself to students interacting with each other and teaching staff in a dynamic learning environment accessible both nationally and globally.

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Endnotes
1 The VCPH comprises The University of Melbourne, Monash University, Deakin University and La Trobe University who jointly deliver the MPH program in Victoria.
2 The Aboriginal Health and History subject offered by the Melbourne School of Population Health at The University of Melbourne is called ‘Aboriginal Health: Past to Present’.
3 The Kulin Nation are the federation of Aboriginal tribal groups who occupy the region now known as Melbourne.
4 Koori(e) is a word which describes Aboriginal people of South Eastern Australia.

Contact author for a full list of references.
In the red rock mesa country of the ancestral lands of Luum, the Kingfisher Bird, an exciting yet difficult chapter in Australia’s Settler-Aboriginal relations is unfolding. In the south-eastern Kimberley a small group of women elders holds fast to their belief that only in deep connectedness with the Tjukurpa (the Dreaming; the cosmic life force) can the wellbeing of their peoples be restored.

This is a battle between worlds. These women elders are among the last in the long line of survivors who were raised in the old ways before the advent of White society in their desert lands. Their beliefs pit them hard against White society’s attempts to overwrite their social and cultural lifeways, their philosophies and practices, in almost every dimension: religious/spiritual, administrative/governance, medical/health, educational/knowledge, and sustenance/food.

Despite the vast power differential inherent in this imposition—where the dominant society influences all aspects of their lives—the women elders have persisted in holding fast to their ancestral practices and beliefs. Firmly rooted in their connectedness with their lands, they are the proud custodians of cultural knowledge which positions them among the world’s leading Indigenous cultural ecologists. Their greatest concern, as grandmothers, is that their grand-children and great-grandchildren be safe, be well, and achieve their fullest attainment. They are the tjarrtjara/healers, the nintipuka/educators, and the Law women of Balgo community.

Not inevitably, the elders’ determination has been quashed at every turn. Their aspirations pit them against negligent governments and an inert bureaucracy which at their core reflect a society which has failed to comprehend the potential of the elders’ contribution to their peoples. When Balgo was established as a Catholic Mission in 1939, the missionaries set out to replace the elders (male and female) and to engineer a societal realignment which, they contended, could only be achieved through a generational shift. As the Mission turned secular in 1979-1983, this missionary policy continued to inform the White-led structural development of the settlement. Consequent to the gradual erosion of the cultural lifeways of the local peoples, Balgo has arrived at the last threshold as the elders age and die prematurely, leaving their world to a younger generation who, raised in the dormitories and living in the town, have little need for their elders’ knowledge.

The result has been a frightening decrease in health, and a corresponding increase in childhood sexual abuse, teenage pregnancies, youth suicides, alcoholism and drug abuse ... and the list goes on. White cultural practitioners (governments and their bureaucracies) react by too often blaming the victims of being ‘dysfunctional’, while not wanting to engage with their own. But what sane person would continue to bash their head against the massive brick wall of White culture which lies firmly constructed at the dangerous intersection between Settler and Indigenous societies – in Balgo’s case for seventy years? That, from the outside, these people might seem to ‘not [be] taking responsibility’ (i.e. engaging in ‘passive resistance’) is clear evidence that they are not insane, not dysfunctional. It is the relationship at the meeting place between the disparate societies which needs to be examined.

This is precisely where, as a sociologist, I am positioned: in the often treacherous borderlands between contrasting and clashing worlds. In 1998, the elders requested that I assist them to establish the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Law and Culture Centre – a dynamic place of cultural learning for women and girls. I grounded my inquiry into the local terrain – social, cultural, physical, spiritual. My methodology developed from within the experience itself.

When I first began fieldwork here in 1999, I entered the elders’ domain loaded with questions and totting a tape recorder and notebook. Because I had crossed boundaries between worlds, and thus traversed realities, these orthodox methods of inquiry simply didn’t work. I could have pushed (as many do) but that would have been to impose my worldview on the elders’ and that was not why I was here. My research method had to fit into their processes, to connect with and reflect their Indigenous ways of knowing and of being. Experiencing culture shock, pitted against my own inculcated racism, and striving to diminish the cultural collision between our two societies, I slowly began to unravel the complexities of living as an Irish-Australian woman in a remote desert community. It was a powerful learning experience.

Living in a one room tin shed for two years with thirteen elders, one small grand-daughter and eleven dogs brought me up against myself in a way that proved ultimately illuminating. Extremely painful and awkward in the process, this amazing initiation into the exchange between societies was played out in my own person. Over the proceeding ten years, my friendship with the elders and their families has taken on a depth of exponential proportions, ever increasing my awareness, but without those early years of direct and intimate relationship it would never have been possible.

It was in this lived-in context that I threw away my questions, and gave away my tape recorder, resolving instead to simply live, to live simply, with the women elders. My research arose...
from and embedded itself in my Relationship with them, and with their community and their Country. This in turn was informed by Merleau-Ponty’s notion of Phenomenology (1962) – i.e. the science of experience – as I began to draw on physical, emotional and spiritual avenues for my learning. And, remaining encased within the context of the elders’ Kapululangu project, I committed to participatory action research which, unique to that environment, took the form of Indigenous Self-Determination.

And thus my methodology developed as a triptych correspondent to the Indigenous women’s own ways of learning, and of teaching. What I learned, what I was taught by the elders, would never have been possible if I had not first learned to ‘Live on the Ground’ with them and put my research ostensibly aside (dé Ishtar, 2005b). I began to ask my questions only of myself. Instead I learned to wait, watch and witness. This was not merely because in local Indigenous etiquette it is impolite to ask questions of anyone who is not walytja/family, nor because my questions had to swim between different worldviews and thus often lead to misunderstandings, but because it was White society and its productions which increasingly interested me.

I learned to use myself and the elders’ interactions with other Kartiya (Whitefellas) as the source of my data. Only then could I begin to truly comprehend the full extent to which inquiries and interventions into the problems confronting Indigenous lives have failed and to understand that this is primarily because they have overlooked White society’s role in the interaction. It is at the core of White society that many of the answers to the ongoing conundrum of what to do about the crises imploping in Aboriginal communities hide. And it was only with this realisation that I was able to grasp the immense importance of the elders’ precious gift to their peoples – a treasure which has been so often misrecognised, misappropriated, marginalised and under-resourced – and yet which is so vitally central to the solution.

In the privileged yet challenging position of Founding Coordinator of the Kapululangu Women’s Law and Culture Centre I rub up hard against the dominant society’s paradigms. Kapululangu has achieved much in its ten years of existence but it has all been uphill against a society which does not, and does not want, to understand. A society which, acting out of an ingrained attitude where the logic of terra nullius (empty land) continues to inform its sensibilities, has arrogantly asserted itself over and above the indigenous realities, squashing all its initiatives – including those of the Balgo women. It is to the women elders’ credit that they have achieved so much against this well-resourced and thus powerful onslaught.

Kapululangu was established with the purpose of deflecting the negative impacts of White society. From the elders’ perspective, Balgo’s severe health and social problems – where the life-expectancy differential between societies is 28 years not the 20 years it is nationally (KDGP, 2004:np; Oxfam, 2007) – are largely the result of externally-introduced rapid cultural change. Quite unlike organic cultural change which arises from within the community, this imposed process has resulted in the younger generations ‘losing their culture’, as the elders put it. As the sustaining and strengthening foundation of their Indigenous cultural base has been dramatically removed or incrementally eroded this has ruptured and undermined their sense of self.

For Kapululangu, ‘culture’ means the embodied feeling of right fit in the world. When the cultural base becomes thin due to the loss of its practice, or by the dwindling numbers of elder knowledge custodians, this removes the spiritual and psychological supports which hold and sustain the individual (dé Ishtar, 2005a). When these supports are lacking, the individual becomes unprotected and experiences an ethnopsychological state of disorientation and dissociation with their environment (Bennett and Castiglioni, 2004). Tossed into the chasm between worlds, they seek refuge in deviances which are not conducive with healthy lives. Without access to the incremental lifeways training practiced by their peoples for millennia, the younger generations have become largely dependent on White society and its practices – practices from which their full participation is barred by the structural racism which underlies their development and delivery.

Keenly interested in the future of their grandchildren and believing that the underlying cause of illness is spiritually-based (refer to Judy Atkinson’s (2002) work on cultural trauma) the Kapululangu elders have long striven to raise their grandchildren and great-grannies ‘strong for Law, strong for culture’. As tjartjurna (traditional women healers) their answer to their peoples’ health lies in their relationship with self, kin, land and cosmos (Tjukurpa/Dreaming), coupled with respect for family and community.

Following this argument, any attempt to solve the problems in Balgo without involving the women elders’ contribution would not only be futile but detrimental to affecting positive social outcomes. Unless the foundation of Law (philosophy/cosmology) and culture (customary practice) is strong, all of the bricks of education, medical intervention and housing (to name just a few) will continue to fall down. A wall is only as strong as its foundation, and that foundation is, for the Kapululangu elders, their own Law, their relationship with the Tjukurpa.
This widely-held belief has engendered a vibrant and forceful intergenerational cultural knowledge program which has catered for all sectors of their community and achieved much. Starting with the formation of a Tjilimi (residential Women’s House) the elders have led ceremonies on the Balgo Women’s Law Ground, run weekly culture classes for girls, culture camps for girls and prepubescent boys, taken young women on hunting excursions and trips to Country, formed a dancing troupe and performed regionally and internationally, run Women’s Law Camps and led women’s Law Time ceremonies and Sorry/mourning rituals, provided tjarrtjurra traditional healing for females and males of all ages, offered a safe refuge for women and children experiencing family violence and sexual abuse, patrolled the community at night in response to petrol sniffing among youth, and supported the male elders in their cultural work with young men and post-pubescent boys. All of this has been achieved within the Indigenous domain, by people who are accused of ‘doing nothing to help themselves’.

In contrast, within the White domain, Kapululangu has failed to engage the imagination much less the financial support of any government minister or bureaucrat who controls the resources going to Indigenous society. What little funding has been deemed appropriate for women in Balgo has been channelled through a third party that holds the purse-strings: the historically dysfunctional local administration. This is despite this entity having been plagued by Whitefella mismanagement and at times corruption since its invention in 1979 such that it was finally placed under administration in 2003 by the slow-moving Federal government. It overlooks this ill-fated entity’s historical propensity stretching back to 1986 of misappropriating the Balgo women’s money they have been charged with auspicing. That successive governments have chosen against directly funding the women’s organisation despite the elders having consistently proven their capability raises the question of whether this hiatus of support is the expression of a society which does not want Indigenous women to succeed in reinstating their peoples’ traditional cultural paradigms.

The Kapululangu story is clear evidence of the bureaucratic short-sightedness and lack of historical accountability which is governing Indigenous affairs in Australia today. And that, in tum, is in large part an answer to why there is such a ‘Gap’ between all the indicators of wellbeing comparing Indigenous and Settler society. My project as a sociologist resident in Balgo is not yet completed, unfortunately, Balgo remains a prime location from which to study the dysfunction of White society and its influence on Indigenous peoples, in particular in regard to the cultural aspirations of Indigenous women elders in remote desert communities. The health crisis in Aboriginal communities, ‘The Gap’, will continue unabated until the challenge of Settler society living more amiably with Indigenous society is finally answered and local Indigenous people’s cultural initiatives are fully resourced and supported.

Zohl dé Ishtar

References

Call for contributions
Teaching Sociology
If you would like to contribute to the next edition of NEXUS please contact:

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by
31 October 2008
Australian Indigenous experiences of family and sexual violence have received much media and government attention since 2006. Three state government reports focusing on the sexual abuse of children in particular have been published in this time. These reports have highlighted the disproportionate incidence of sexual assault and family violence within Indigenous communities and the many complexities associated with such experiences. They have also illustrated that Indigenous communities are actively considering pathways forward for healing and for justice for victims, their families, and the broader kin network who inevitably feel the ripple effects of such violence. Yet in popular discourse these pathways and actions remain invisible. Instead, national ‘Emergencies’ are declared as if this is a ‘new’ problem with frantic calls to save Indigenous children from ‘living out a Hobbesian nightmare of violence, abuse and neglect’ (Howard 2007). As is well known, late last year legislation was passed representing ‘a sweeping assumption of power and a necessary assumption of responsibility’ and the lives of Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory from that moment in time were forever changed (Howard 2007).

As an Indigenous researcher working in the field of family violence and child abuse with a particular focus on building an evidence base of what works and does not work, it is clear to me that last year’s events and the proposed interventions in many ways contradicted the evidence. For example, the media attention certainly made the occurrence of violence in remote areas more visible, making it the focus of concern. But little if any attention was paid to the incidence and experience of violence in the urban context. I have been involved in analysing data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002 which asked respondents ‘In the last 12 months, did anyone, including people you know, use or threaten to use physical force or violence against you?’ Almost one in four Indigenous Australians (24%) reported being a victim of physical or threatened violence. The proportion was similar for Indigenous males and females, 26% and 23% respectively. The proportion of people who reported being a victim of violence, however, did not vary with remoteness. There was a slight difference between major cities (25%) and remote and very remote areas (23%) but this was not statistically significant (ABS 2004: 13). Therefore Indigenous family violence is not isolated to remote areas, it is as prevalent in urban settings.

Research also tells us that to respond to the problem necessitates an understanding of the population in which it occurs and the factors contributing to it. Evidence is now available that argues multiple interrelated factors are responsible (Cripps 2004, Cripps 2007, Gordon 2002, Robertson 1999). Few interventions, however, follow a social ecological framework in responding to family violence. This framework recognises and incorporates in its model of practice the familial, cultural and social contexts in which the violence occurs. Typical ‘western’ responses to family violence have tended to respond by focusing on either the victim or perpetrator, the crisis, and on maintaining law and order. Indigenous communities have found this approach to be culturally inappropriate and ineffective in the context of their experiences of violence (Cripps, 1998; Gordon, 2002; Luna, 1999; Robertson, 1999, Thorpe et al. 2004). A more holistic approach that recognises the effects of violence on all family members – the victim, perpetrator, the children, the victim’s family, the perpetrator’s family is needed.

In the last decade a plethora of federal and state government commissioned reports on the problem have been publicly released. Some of these reports have included:

- The Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Task Force on Violence Report (1999);
- Putting the Picture Together, Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities (‘The Gordon Inquiry’) (2002);
- The Tasmanian inquiry into family violence – ‘Ya pulingina kani – Good to see you talk’ (2002);
- The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report (2003);
- Ampe Akelyememane Meke Mekarlke: ‘Little Children are Sacred’ Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse (2007); and

These reports have been critical in keeping the issue of violence as it occurs in Indigenous communities on the public agenda. The reports define family violence in relation to how local people understand it; detail the extent of the problem; the causes; the interventions that are working and are not working; and make significant recommendations for change that are applicable to both federal and state governments.

My work has involved an analysis of the recommendations of these reports and it demonstrates that several recurring
themes are evident. These include, in particular, recognition of community diversity and needs, the need to facilitate community choices in responses to problems, and the dire need for coordinated and meaningful partnerships between Indigenous communities, governments and service providers so that appropriate support can be provided to those affected by violence. But while a partnership approach to Indigenous family violence is widely advocated as the ‘gold standard’, the practice of implementing, progressing and sustaining partnerships particularly at the level of ‘whole of government - whole of community’ has proven to be a difficult task. Last year’s events are a clear example of this, in that the Northern Territory government, the authors of the Little Children Are Sacred report, and various government departments and service providers admitted to the media that the federal government had not consulted them in the drafting of the emergency interventions. All of the parties, however, were expected to work together in partnership in the implementation of the interventions—a partnership that largely appeared to be one-sided with the federal government dictating all of the terms. Indigenous leaders and organisations rightly expressed their anger at this time, as their right to sit at the table, their voices, opinions, and experiences in this area were not acknowledged and/or valued in the development or implementation of the interventions. Many people were feeling that this ‘thing’ was being done to them as opposed to being an active participant or a valued partner. In many ways the actions of government failed to recognise what many of these reports had articulated for years. That is: ‘It’s the community that has to make the change. They can do it, but not without the support of the Government agencies, we need the services to back us up. If the community aren’t involved, it just won’t work’ (NSW Taskforce 2006: 63).

Thus to move forward we need to critically examine the practical implications of a ‘partnership’ approach and how Indigenous communities in particular can be better supported in this process to have their voices heard and to have their needs addressed according to their priorities and process. My current research is examining these questions in the context of a place-based study critically examining Indigenous and non-Indigenous interventions and models of practice in responding to family violence within 4-6 sites across Victoria. What are the differences and similarities in their philosophical foundations, practice, working environments, capacity, resources, and potential for sustainability? Are the interventions already working in partnership? What does partnership mean to the organisations concerned? What does ‘partnership’ mean in practical terms and what are the implications for service delivery for both organisations? What other partnerships might be beneficial to the Indigenous or mainstream program responding to Indigenous family violence? Why would a working relationship between specific organisations be beneficial? How might a partnership between the organisations operate in practice? What might the limitations to ‘partnerships’ be? What gaps, if any, may remain with or without the development of these partnerships? And looking to the future, can Indigenous and mainstream organisations working in this field come together to sustain both their interventions and models of practice?

This research is important in the context that Indigenous interventions responding to family violence often operate outside the mainstream and remain largely unrecognised. They are interventions that are operating from the premise that solutions to the problem lie within our communities and that to combat the problem requires addressing all those affected by it. These are initiatives guided, supported and led by community members. In a comprehensive review of the literature only three studies have surveyed and documented Australian Indigenous family violence interventions (Blagg 2000, Cripps 2004, Memmott et al. 2001). While these studies are valuable in their own right they do have limitations and none document in detail the intervention, its models of practice and the scope and functionality of partnerships. The three studies mentioned above have also highlighted that the majority of Indigenous programs operate solely on government funding. Many of the reports into Indigenous family violence have commented on the adequacy of the funding arrangements, for example in the Little Children Are Sacred report it was said ‘we have a 20-year history of six-month programs’; and ‘we have been piloting pilots for long enough’ (Wild & Anderson 2007: 55). An evaluation report of Indigenous family violence related programs administered by FaHCSIA released in December 2007 reinforces these comments: ‘the short-term nature of funding, and the absence of clear evidence of exit and transition strategies to alternative ongoing funding sources meant that the [family violence interventions] were likely to have limited long term viability’ (Office of Evaluation & Audit 2007: 4). Adequate funding over the long term is a fundamental necessity in responding to the violence taking place in our communities. Without it the capacity of community members and organisations to deliver services to the increasing numbers of people requesting their support is jeopardised.

In the current policy environment where governments are also targeting need in ‘remote’ areas as opposed to urban areas, the issues surrounding availability of government funding and the sustainability of existing programs relying on that funding now and into the future is also questionable (Cripps 2007, 2004). Indeed, there has been and continues
to be an expectation that Indigenous people living in urban and regional areas can and should access mainstream services however inappropriate or inaccessible they are perceived to be. Against this background several questions arise: in particular, how do existing Indigenous programs sustain themselves and what is the capacity of mainstream services to respond adequately and appropriately to the problem of Indigenous family violence? The research I am currently undertaking will be examining these questions particularly in the context of the value and practical implications of partnerships at the local level.

Few researchers have dared tackle this political and sensitive subject matter. As one of only a handful of researchers in this area, the demands to be an advocate/policy maker/researcher can at times be immense, but it is also incredibly rewarding. The innovation, resilience, courage and sheer determination of Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers working in this field is inspiring. The time is ripe to hear their stories and to support them in the important work that they do at the coal face—this is my work, and I encourage others to join me.

References

Contact author for a full list of references.
If you are anything like me, this is a time of year when attending conferences is a foremost concern in one’s mind. This is particularly the case for postgraduate students who will forge vitally important networking links with other academics as well as practitioners from government and industry. There are many decisions to make in relation to these events: what conferences to attend; when should you attend; should they be international or national conferences; how to get around funding issues; and how you can get the most out of the event. In our third installment of postgraduate issues discussions, I will examine some thoughts and tips on how to make these decisions strategically and smartly, and how to make the most of these important events based on my own experiences.

There are a range of initial decisions that will drive conference attendance as a postgraduate student. These can unfortunately be tied to available funding. Given that funding arrangements vary widely for students depending on where they are situated and what is available, conferencing opportunities can be limited to what you are able to fund yourself. My advice in this regard would be: play detective and dig deep. Are there any funding schemes that you can apply for through the organisation hosting the conference (like the TASA Postgraduate Conference Scholarship)? Are there any university funding schemes (like Grants-In-Aid) that enable you to attend conferences as a postgraduate student? If these schemes are unavailable, who can you ask that might know about funding opportunities (like Supervisors, Heads of School, Deans of Faculty, and Assistant Deans (Research))? The point to remember is that if you publish a paper, you will be making money for the School/Faculty in which you are situated, regardless of whether or not you intend to work in academia or industry. You can use this to your advantage and perhaps seek information about money that may be available if this were to be made possible. This can be even more of an advantage if you can tum a 3,000 word refereed conference paper into a longer 7,000 word journal article at a later date (which is what TASA allows) – then the School/Faculty gets two lots of money from your publishing efforts. So think carefully and strategically: which conferences enable you to publish papers in proceedings that can later be published as journal articles, and how can you negotiate funding based on this? You should also check out external funding sources such as the Ian Potter Travelling Scholarships.

Depending on the discipline area, a postgraduate sociologist can be inundated as well as limited with conference options. Some students it seems might get a ‘call for papers’ every month on relevant topics, while others are lucky if they find a relevant conference every year. There are ways of being strategic, even if options are limited. Be informed about what is actually on: sign up for conference alerts (www.conferencealerts.com); join organisations (like TASA and other international sociological associations) and read their newsletters and check their websites regularly for information about conferences; ask people in the know (your supervisor, other postgraduate students and colleagues) what they go to, when, and how often; and sign up for discussion groups/lists that send through ‘calls for papers’. Once you have done this, you can start to think broadly about where your work ‘fits’. For example, when I analysed fashion modelling in my PhD thesis, I never found a conference dedicated to this topic in the years that I was doing it. As a sociologist, I found so much vibrancy in sociology and postgraduate student conferences, where I could present anything from my work, and other conferences related specifically with certain areas of my thesis: cultural studies (my theoretical framework); qualitative research (my methodological framework); fashion conferences (fashion models and the body); and body modification (analysing body work). In doing this, I found relatively good exposure for my work, even if these arenas were only broadly linked to my topic area. Every section of your thesis has a conference paper in it - you just need to find where these papers fit best.

Even if you are not starved for choice, you still need to be strategic in deciding what to attend. Think carefully about which conferences are going to have the greatest number of people in your area attending. Who are the people who it would be in the best interest of your work to meet? Can you meet these people at a small, more-focused conference, where it may be cheaper and have increased networking opportunities due to fewer delegates, as opposed to a larger conference that may be more expensive and where you might have less chance of meeting the people that are important to your work? Can you target conferences that provide a combination of both academic and industry representatives in your area? A great place to start with this thinking process is your supervisor: they are usually the person that knows everyone in their area and can point you in the right direction.

Once you have made a decision about which conference(s) you are going to attend, and you have had your abstract/paper accepted, you still have the room to think strategically in terms of how you approach it. Networking is without any doubt one of the most useful strategies that you can use. This is not necessarily easy though: it can take time to get used to going up and talking to someone you don’t know. Get to know some standard questions that you can use to ‘break the ice’ like: What area of sociology are you working on? Is this your first conference? Where are you from? What do
you do? This is fairly basic stuff but it is a good way to start off a conversation. I like to work from a basic standard and try to meet one new person each day of the conference.

One of the best pieces of networking advice that I would pass on from my own PhD supervisor is: if you have a choice between going to a session and having a ‘drink at the bar with a big wig’, take the drink. While it is good to see as many papers as you can, a lot of opportunities come out of those unplanned moments chatting with someone of note in your area. Further to this, there is no reason why you cannot ‘engineer’ this at a conference. Email a person of interest that you want to meet and know is attending, tell them how you admire their work, attach your paper/abstract, and arrange a suitable time to meet with them and chat further. Most people are open to these types of situations so think about taking the plunge. Networking is imperative for all postgraduate students – it can get you jobs, research partners, recommendations, mentors, general support networks of other postgraduates in your area, and, most importantly, like-minded friends!

Finally, I have a few points on things to remember to make your conference enjoyable as well as productive. Firstly, make sure that you have some sort of ‘business card’ that you can take with you. I use this in inverted commas because most postgraduate students will not have access to a resource like this. However, you can certainly type up some pieces of paper to take along with you. This is better than nothing and better than scrambling for a piece of paper and a pen (which is what I did all the way through my candidature!). Secondly, ensure that you have practised your paper before presenting it. This gives you additional confidence in a presentation situation that is probably one of the most stressful that you will undergo during your study. Enlist a ‘critical friend’ in the form of another postgraduate student to sit through your presentation before you leave. Thirdly, prepare for critical feedback, even if this is more commonly the exception rather than the rule. The supportive, much smarter conference delegates will help you. However, if someone has got something critical to say, don’t immediately presume they are correct. Thank them for their comments and tell them you will follow it up further. Fourthly, if you have met people at the conference that you would like to develop working relationships with in future, take the time to send them a short email when you return about how you enjoyed meeting them. This can be good for stimulating further conversation and ideas as well as making them feel that their time was well spent and that you are keen to chat with them more.

One final point: find some ‘time out’. Often the week before the conference you can be scrambling to finalise all the different tasks that you need to finish before you leave. Students have told me time and again that the only ‘down time’ they often get is sitting on the plane. Add to this, conferences can be very taxing because you can often be ‘on duty’ from when you get to the conference in the morning until long after dinner with colleagues in the late evening. Take some time out and get some photographs so you can use these if you need to report on your conference attendance. And most importantly, have fun!

Angela Dwyer
Postgraduate Representative, TASA Executive

Expressions of Interest

We are seeking expressions of interest from Thematic Groups wishing to have a special edition of NEXUS in 2009.

If your thematic group would like to contribute to an issue please email Christopher on C.Fox@latrobe.edu.au
NEXUS

UNINEWS

University of Ballarat

Jeremy Smith is completing two commissioned articles for the European Journal of Social Theory on civilizations analysis and on Johann Adamson’s work on Japanese modernity. He is also completing a commissioned article for the Journal of Intercultural Studies. In 2006, he and Brill published a monograph Europe and the Americas: State Formation, Capitalism and Civilizations in Atlantic Modernity (introduced by S N Eisenstadt) and is planning a follow-up book. He has also recently co-authored two articles on social movement activism and happiness with Alice Mills in Borderlands e-journal and The Qualitative Report.

Kate Brass has had a paper accepted for the Fifth World Conference on the Promotion of Mental Health and the Prevention of Mental and Behavioural Disorders to be held in Melbourne in September this year. This paper questions the decision to highlight social participation rather than social exclusion, or even social inclusion, as one of the three key determinants of mental health promotion. This questioning arises from research conducted for PhD candidature which takes a critical approach to the concept of social participation, and related terms. The research was conducted collaboratively with community members and practitioners within a mental health promotion program being conducted by a Community Health Centre in Victoria. This program includes the objective of providing opportunities for increased social interaction. This research makes visible the complex meanings that both practitioners and community members experiencing the program have constructed for social participation/exclusion, and related terms and analyses the implications of those meanings for effective mental health promotion policy. The program impact has been very positive in terms of increased social interactions. Nevertheless, feedback as to how to facilitate increased social participation went way beyond the provision of such programs. A broad array of actions that policy makers must take to prevent exclusion and so increase participation were identified. The research concludes that lack of participation and exclusion are not experienced separately and should not be separated at the policy level. When the focus is on participation then people’s non-participation is cast as the problem. Exclusion itself remains as the unchallenged norm. At the policy level, we need leadership around creating a society where inclusion is the norm and people’s level of participation is determined by them, not an economy underpinned by exclusion, where participation is dependent on short term initiatives to re-include targeted groups.

John McDonald

University of Queensland

2008 is shaping up to be a productive year for sociology and criminology at UQ, with some major research achievements. In 2007, the University established the Institute for Social Science Research, appointing Mark Western as Acting Director of the ISSR in 2008. The Institute consists of four research centres, two research programs, and five major research infrastructure facilities, including the Australian Research Council Network in Spatially Integrated Social Science; The Queensland node of the Australian Social Science Data Archive (ASSDA); and the UQ node of the ARC Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security (CEPS). A recent ISSR initiative has been the establishment of an Australian Qualitative Data Archive (AQ:U) by a team of researchers including Mark Western, Lynda Cheshire and Mike Emmison (UQ), Deb Mitchell (ANU) and Alex Broom (Newcastle). The archive forms part of a large, $4m project secured by ASSDA to enhance Australia’s archival infrastructure for the social sciences.

A number of staff have taken study leave this year and spent time overseas as visiting scholars. Zlatko Skrbis was Visiting Professorial Fellow at Warwick University during April and May where he gave an inaugural lecture for the Centre for Rights, Equality and Diversity, while Lynda Cheshire spent three months in the sociology program at The University of Southampton. This semester, Janeen Baxter and Michael Emmison are taking study leave. Janeen will spend time as Visiting Professor at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the University of London while Mike is luxuriating in research and writing closer to home before embarking on a visit to Europe next year.

Staff have also been busy with national and international conferences. In April, Janeen Baxter attended the Population Association of America conference in New Orleans where she presented a paper with Belinda Hewitt and Paula England (Stanford University); in July, Mark Western, Michele Haynes and postdoctoral fellow, Xianbi Huang, attended the 2008 American Sociological Association Meetings in Boston, while Mark also attended the RC28 Summer Conference at Stanford University. Also in July, postgraduate student, Jenny Chesers, presented a co-authored paper with John Western at the RC2 meeting in Neucatel Switzerland. Lynda Cheshire, Geoffrey Lawrence, Carol Richards and PhD student, Samantha Neal, attended the IRSA World Congress of Rural Sociology in Korea where Lynda was elected as First Vice-President for IRSA 2008-2012. A group of postgraduate students (Jenny Chesers, Amanda Hosking and Sandra Buchier) also attended and presented at the Australian Institute of Family Studies conference in July in...
Melbourne, along with Janeen Baxter, and Zlatko Skrbis gave a keynote address at the Unity and Diversity Conference, Townsville in August. Zlatko is also about to head off to the ISA Forum in Barcelona where he is co-convening the RC05 program with Peter Ratcliffe from Warwick.

There have also been some staff developments at UQ with new arrivals, promotions and visitors. Rochelle Stewart-Withers recently joined the School from Massey University in New Zealand, while Carol Richards, one of our former PhD students, returned from an overseas position to take up a postdoctoral research fellowship working with Geoffrey Lawrence on his food and supermarkets project. Meanwhile, Tabatha Wallington has left the school to take up a research fellowship with CSIRO. Adrian Chemey is also due to join the growing criminology program in November this year, bringing with him a grant from the American Airforce: Asian Office of Scientific Research, which he secured with Christine Bond and others to examine institutional legitimacy in post-conflict societies in the Asia-Pacific region. Amazingly, Christine has managed to work on this, and other projects on Indigenous sentencing, while taking maternity leave with twins. Zlatko Skrbis is spending 25% of his time as Co-Associate Dean of Research while Lynda Cheshire and Rebecca Wickes will also move to half time positions in the school after being seconded on other projects: Rebecca is to head up the Vulnerable Communities project in CEPS for three years and Lynda has been appointed as Director of AQaA for 2009-2010. We have also been fortunate to have various visitors join us, including Professor Reidar Almas and Associate Professor Hilde Bjoma from Norway; Professor David Burch from Griffith University; and Professor Fiona Devine from Manchester. Nevertheless, UQ is not the same without ARC post doc Belinda Hewitt who recently left to take up a one year visiting scholar post in the Netherlands. We are already eagerly awaiting her return.

Finally, one of the most enjoyable aspects of our work is witnessing the success of our PhD students as they complete their degrees and develop their own successful careers. The July graduation produced a bumper crop of UQ PhD graduates, including Tara McGee, Yvonne Lafferty; Pat Malikao and Carol Richards. Laura Cox and Lachlan Heybroek also graduated with First Class Honours in Sociology with Laura receiving a University Medal. Peter Walters has recently submitted his thesis while Margery Mayall and Carolyn Brown have had their degrees awarded. We extend our congratulations to them all.

Lynda Cheshire

Newcastle University

The Discipline welcomes two new staff, who begin at the end of the year: Dr Hamed Hosseini and Dr Daniela Heil. Dr Alex Broom was recently awarded a University Strategic Pilot grant ($18 000) for ‘An exploratory study of the use of non-biomedical treatments by cancer patients in Sri Lanka’. We have also established 10 x $2000 Honours scholarships for 2009 to support students to undertake full-time honours study. We continue to award two student prizes annually to high performing students, with each prize including TASA membership. Congratulations to the 2007 recipients: Mathew Toll (TASA Prize for Excellence in First Year Sociology) and Shane Hickmott (Lois Bryson Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Sociology).

John Germov

Queensland University of Technology


Peta Cook is finalising her PhD thesis, which examines the construction of xenotransplantation (animal-to-human transplantation) in Australia through two main concepts – animals and risk. She has also recently received an EASST travel stipend to present her research at the combined European Association for the Study of Science and Technology (EASST) and Society for the Social Study of Science (4S) conference, held from 20-23 August 2008 in Rotterdam, Netherlands.

Paul Harrison is currently enjoying long-service leave, and will return to QUT later in the semester.

School of Justice, Faculty of Law Matthew Ball recently joined the School of Justice in the Faculty of Law as an Associate Lecturer. He is currently completing his PhD research on the construction of legal identity within Australian legal education, using Foucault’s work on governmentality. He is also undertaking research into violence in male same-sex intimate partnerships.

Angela Dwyer is currently working on a small project on queer (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, queer, and questioning) young people and their experiences of policing in Brisbane, Queensland. The key focus is on how queer young people’s embodiment of ‘queerness’ may inform policing processes for better and worse.
Tara McGee has recently returned from a British Academy Visiting Fellowship at the University of Cambridge, Institute of Criminology. She was working with Professor David Farrington to examine adult onset offending. With Rebecca Wickes, Jake Najman and William Bor, Tara has also secured an Australian Criminology Research Council grant to examine Crime in neighbourhoods: Individuals and families in context.

Upcoming Conference
The Asia-Pacific Peace Research Association (APPRA) will be holding a conference for regional academics, government and major institutions at the College of Indigenous Studies, National Dong Hwa University, Hualien, Taiwan from 10-12 September, 2009. The university is situated in a scenic area about 2.5 hrs by train/road from Taipei. The Conference theme is Challenges for the Future of Peace in Asia-Pacific. There will be three strands to this conference: The Challenge of Sustainability; Building Cultures of Peace; Governance, Development and Government. Participant numbers will be limited to 150. Shared accommodation at modest rates will be provided on-campus, or private lodging in local hotels will be available. Registration will be approx. US$140. Australian scholars working on aspects of Asia-Pacific in the contemporary context of cultures, politics and human development are warmly invited to submit paper proposals/abstracts. Paper proposals and further enquiries should be sent to Dr. John Synott, Humanities Program, Queensland University of Technology (j.synott@qut.edu.au or phone, 07 3138 4725).

Peta Cook

Monash University

Alan Petersen organised and chaired an Australian Panel at the BSA Medical Sociology Annual Conference at University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, in September 2008. The Panel, comprising Evan Willis, Marilyn Guilleman, Karen Willis and Fran Collyer, explored developments in Australian health sociology and links between BSA and TASA.

Alan has also been invited to be a member of the International Advisory Board of the Centre for Biomedicine and Society at King's College, London, and the International Advisory Board of Sociology of Health and Illness. He will convene a conference in November 2008 on Nanotechnology: Science, Policy and Public Perspectives.

Alan has had a recent co-edited book published, Biobanks: Governance in Comparative Perspective (Palgrave) (with Herbert Gottweis, University of Vienna); and has recently completed a book, Nanotechnology, Risk and Communication (Palgrave) (with Alison Anderson, Clare Wilkinson and Stuart Allan).

Andrew Singleton is part of a research team with sociologists from ACU (M Mason & R Webber), who are conducting research on the impact of Catholic World Youth Day. Prior to WYD being held in July 2008, the team conducted an internet survey with more than 12,000 registered pilgrims. They have also conducted dozens of in-depth interviews.

Denise Cuthbert

Flinders University

In July 2008, Anthony Elliott was Visiting Research Professor at the Department of Sociology, Open University, UK. During this visit, Professor Elliott was conducting research for his recently awarded ARC Discovery project on Globalization, Transnationalism and Identity. On 4 July, he delivered a key-note address at the Open University to the Psycho-Social Centre titled "Unconscious Assemblages". On 17 July, he delivered a public lecture titled "Bodies and Bits: How Cosmetic Surgery is Transforming Our Lives" at the Open University. He was also a Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Mobilities, Lancaster University - where he is working with Professor John Urry on a new project concerning mobilities, lifestyles and life-politics.

In August Professor Elliott visited Singapore, where he is working with Professor Bryan Turner - formerly of Flinders Sociology and now Chair of the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. Professors Elliott and Turner are working on a research project critically appraising the concept of society in social theory in particular and the social sciences in general. Professor Elliott has also continued to receive further media attention for his recent book on cosmetic surgery, Making The Cut. He appeared in a feature interview on Brazilian television for the Globonews programme 'Milenio'. He was also interviewed for the American monthly 'Cosmetic Surgery Times'.

Professor Elliott has now taken on the role of Head of Department and is planning a series of Master Classes for 2009, to be conducted by eminent, international sociologists.

Emeritus Professor Riaz Hassan has been appearing at Writers' Festivals, including Byron Bay and Melbourne, as a result of the recent publication and widespread
review of his book Inside Muslim Minds. In his first session at the Melbourne Writers’ Festival he discussed with Waleed Aly: “Allah is one; Islam is many, the varieties of Islamic consciousness in the twenty-first century”. The second session was titled “A clash of civilisations?”. Riaz discussed with Hanifa Deen and Arnold Zable whether the tensions and fault-lines in Australian society were the result of increasingly polarised religious and cultural values. Professor Hassan is spending September doing research and attending conferences in Islamabad and Barcelona.


Dr Mary Holmes is currently a visiting scholar at the Centre for Women’s Studies at the University of York, UK. Her latest book has come out: Gender in Everyday Life (Routledge - see routledgesociology.com/books/Gender-and-Everyday-Life-isbn9780415423496).

The Department welcomes back Dr Brad West from the UK, where he has been an Honorary Fellow at the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, King’s College London.

Carolyn Corkindale
Charles Sturt University

Dr Helen Masterman-Smith (School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Charles Sturt University) and Prof. Barbara Pocock (Centre for Work and Life, UniSA) are due to release a new book, Living Low Paid: The Dark Side of Prosperous Australia through Allen and Unwin in November. Based on three years of qualitative investigation and new quantitative data, the book chronicles the dire realities of low pay and working poverty in Australia today and the consequences for individual workers, their households and communities, and the wider social and democratic fabric of Australia. For further details contact: hmasterman-smith@csu.edu.au

TASA members are invited to a political economy conference, Work, Globalisation and Democracy, at the University of Wollongong on 9-10 July 2009. The call for abstracts is currently open until 17 October 2008. Academic abstract/paper submission guidelines are available from the conference website (www.geocities.com/peaconference/). A small registration fee will be advised on the website (along with other details). Hosted by: Gramsci Society (Asia-Pacific) and the Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong and sponsored by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Charles Sturt University and the Work, Organisations and Welfare Centre and the Centre for Policy, Culture and Ideas at Griffith University. Contact details: hmasterman-smith@csu.edu.au

Angela Ragusa

TASA Postgraduate Workshop 2008
Tuesday 2nd December 2008
1:30pm-6:00pm

Session topics include: networking session, publishing, research methodologies, and postgraduate sociologist career options outside academe.

Aims:
- To provide a supportive environment in which sociology higher degree students can network
- To promote the development of academic skills applicable during and after higher degree study
- To showcase a range of post-higher degree career pathways to sociology higher degree students

To register tick the box on the online registration and download the registration form (registration is free).

For more information contact Angela Dwyer on ae.dwyer@qut.edu.au
Economic Sociology Thematic Group

The first issue of the ‘xchange newsletter was published earlier this month, featuring a Q&A with Economics Editor for The Sydney Morning Herald Ross Gittins. We talk to Ross about some of the shortcomings of mainstream economics, how he came to question a number of key economic tenets, and how he understands economic sociology as making a useful contribution in the future.

Michael Gilding looks at the rational actor model by exploring the way social relationships, enmeshed within his own shopping habits, affect his decision-making in ways that neoclassical economics would have difficulty understanding.

In our research snapshot, Dr Richard Woolley discusses his work as a postdoc research fellow at the Centre for Industry and Innovation Studies the University of Western Sydney. We also feature profiles of two postgraduate researchers, Christopher Baker and Margery Mayall, who are exploring economic issues in fresh and interesting ways.

To finish, we feature an opinion piece from David Love, founder of Syntec (now Access Economics). David’s piece raises the key argument from his book Unfinished Business: Paul Keating’s interrupted revolution.

We hope you enjoy the first issue of Exchange. It is available via our website at www.economicsociology.org.au or you can subscribe by adding your name to our mailing list. Please send your contact details to info@economicsociology.org.au.

Dina Brown

Applied Sociology Thematic Group

The Applied Sociology Thematic Group was formed last year. Applied sociology refers to the use of sociology to answer research questions as defined by clients/practitioners/specialised audiences (rather than the researcher) in the intervention of social life. More broadly, this refers to doing sociology outside of academe, including in non-government organisations, private consultancy, public service, and in other forms of contract (non-ongoing) work. The aim of this group is to provide representation and a voice for sociologists working in these areas.

The Applied Sociology Thematic Group has been liaising with the Sociologists Outside Academia Group (SOAg), which is part of the British Sociological Association. We are looking for ways to increase the collaboration between our groups, and to promote applied sociology at an international level. Together with SOAg, we are trying to negotiate the construction of a webpage that applied sociologists from around the world can use free of charge. The webpage will facilitate an international network of sociologists who work outside academia, and we also welcome academic members who support the aims of applied sociology.

The primary aim of this venture is to function as a peer support network through a web forum. Additionally, we envision that the webpage might support other information sharing, such as uploading documents, articles and other resources/links that might promote sociology as a profession. Furthermore, we are discussing the possibility of establishing a free online publication that will promote the professional activities and diverse career pathways of applied sociologists. We look forward to any suggestions or comments from other TASA members on this proposal.

Interested TASA members may contact us to learn more about our Applied Sociology Thematic Group, and we welcome new members to join us in advancing the efforts of applied sociology in Australia and beyond. Visit the Applied Sociology Thematic Group webpage: www.tasa.org.au/thematic-group/applied-sociology.php

Zuleyka Zevallos
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closing the Gap in Sociology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Walter and P.Pyett</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter from the President</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Gilding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Timely Encounter for Sociological Expertise: Identifying Strategic Policy Directions for Increased and Sustained Indigenous Adult Educational Outcomes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.Nietz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening Indigenous Research Culture</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Walter, J.Maynard, J.Milroy, and M.Nakata</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on a Role for Sociology in Indigenous Health</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.Pyett</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal Health and History: The Use of Interactive Role-Play</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Genat and S.Ewen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing ‘The Gap’ on Indigenous Health? Not Without the Women Elders!</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zdité Ishtar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Family Violence and the NTER Intervention: Public Policy Vs Evidence</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.Cripps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate News: Making the Most of Conferences</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.Dwyer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UniNews</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Groups News</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>