



## Sociology Newsletter

Fall 2009

### Sociology Department Welcomes Renowned Feminist Scholar Susan Douglas

#### *How Media Makes Feminism Seem Unnecessary, and Sexism Fun*



By Amanda Thomson (COMM/SOC 05)

The Sociology Department in collaboration with the Departments of Women's Studies and Communication, Dance and Theater welcomed Dr. Susan Douglas, the Catherine Neafie Kellogg Professor and Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Michigan, to campus for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Ann Plamondon Lecture on September 16th.

Douglas is the author of several books including, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women* and *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. The focus of

Douglas's talk this evening was on her new book, *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work Is Done*.

With her witty criticism Douglas pulls the curtains open on television, music, magazines, and film to reveal a fantasy of female power that leads to what she calls "enlightened sexism." She points to depictions of women in the media that sit at two extremes. On the one-hand we see women as Chief Surgeons, CEOs, and high political officials and on the other hyper-sexuality and unrealistic standards of beauty. The first depictions are merely exaggerations of women's social and political achievements that ultimately allow the second, the resurrection of sexist images, to further render powerful women as "ridiculous" in comparison. "It is empowering and it isn't. It is enlightened sexism," Susan says.

The lecture inspired discussion about the many pressures the media is putting on young women today and how this influences attitudes about feminism. Susan's talk brought together women of all ages and disciplines to critically consider where we have been, where we are, and where we are going.

## Applied Sociology and Service

Steele and Price (2004) define sociological practice as "any use (often client-centered) of the sociological perspective and/or its tools in the understanding of, intervention in, and/or enhancement of human social life." Applied sociology is one of the specialized fields within sociology. Using sociological theories and previous research, applied sociologists "apply" their knowledge to social problems in society in order to find solutions. This use of sociological theories and methods is also referred to as sociological practice.

These social scientists work to create a more equitable society that serves all the people. Applied sociologists work in every level of government from the local and state level to the national and international level. They also work for non-profit community organizations, public administration and even for-profit businesses to solve problems of social organizations within smaller environments.

Many of our Sociology alumnae find an exciting career in applied sociology. The following newsletter is devoted to two of our alumnae who are also applied sociologists.

# Applied Sociology and Sociology Alumnae

## An Alaskan Adventure

By Chelsea Gulling (07)

I am now a regular paid employee at the Children's Advocacy Center. I finished my Jesuit Volunteer year last August. I have learned so much from living in Bethel, Alaska. My first job as a JV was as a Children's Advocate for the domestic violence shelter. I was responsible for some childcare and some after-school groups for children. I also taught some lessons in schools about safe/unsafe touch. I also engaged in community outreach by providing sexual assault lessons in the villages surrounding Bethel. I am, along with all other employees at the agency a SART (sexual assault response team) advocate. We take turns being on call and meet victims at the hospital directly following an assault, if the person chooses to file a report.

When I decided to stay in Bethel, I knew that I wanted a job that focused on similar issues. I am still working at the same umbrella agency (Tundra Women's Coalition); however, I am now under a different program. I work for the Children's Advocacy Center which exists across the country. When reports are made to child protection or law enforcement about child sexual abuse or severe cases of physical abuse, children are brought to the center to be interviewed about their experience. We then offer follow-up services and advocacy to the families. The interviews take the place of law enforcement interviews, and we would like to think we are more child friendly. Law enforcement is present (watching from a closed circuit TV) and the interviews are recorded and given to the District Attorney when appropriate. In a perfect world, children would not have to testify in court because they could just show the DVD; however, generally the child has to testify anyway because most lawyers are more interested in winning than considering what is in the best interest of the child.

I am now working as the child forensic interviewer and do most of the interviews (unless the child is Yupik speaking). I also do outreach as well. It is good experience because in most other parts of the

country, you must have a masters in criminal justice or psychology---however, in Bethel, all you have to do is show up to work to have the position!

I am learning so much. This couldn't have been a better location/job for me right out of college. In my program, I am the only non-native employee, although I do work with a lot of non-natives in the rest of the agency. This, however, is not the norm. I have the most amazing boss/mentor, Elena. I am learning so much from her about local culture and communication, and really, just how to be a good person. She is very patient and loving with everyone.

I really like my job. It's not always easy -- I cried in the bathroom today -- but it's real. Whenever I tell people

what I do, they always comment on how "depressing" it must be. Yes, it can be depressing but not because I am hearing kids talk about sexual abuse. When kids (and all people) talk about their sexual abuse, it is the first step toward healing. What is depressing though, is when people finally do reach out for support, the systems almost always fail them. If not in one way, in another.

I struggle a lot with my place in this region. I am learning how to happily work in the background because the native people here really do have their own answers—it's just that most white people that come here to work don't realize that and they start trampling all over indigenous people. Elena assures me that it is okay to work here as an outsider as long as you can maintain an appropriate attitude.

I really don't know how long I will be here. At first my intention was just to stay for one year, do some "good," and then skedaddle to move on with my life (graduate school or whatever). It didn't take me long to realize how naive that idea was. I have seen all the destruction that is caused by the "transient" non-native workers here. I don't think that it is fair for me to leave yet.

I do, however, have a pretty good idea of what I want to do as a "next step." After meeting an Anchorage based community organizer last year at one of my JV retreats, I really think that may be the right field for me. While I am in no real rush to go to graduate school, and



Chelsea Gulling is pictured to the far left.

there are some great sociology programs that have a community organizing focus, I think that community organizing sounds perfect for me. Although I understand that getting a job in community organizing is more difficult right now because President Obama's call to service is being taken seriously by so many.

## Help is Just Around the Bend

By Meggan Patty (o8)

If you were diagnosed with cancer, would you have all of the support systems you needed in place to beat it, or would you need a little help from



RiverBend Cancer Services? Last year, 152 cancer survivors in the South Bend community needed more than a little help. In fact, 134 of them required about \$70,000 of prescriptions, medical equipment and supplies, wigs and styling and nutritional supplements to fight their battles. Additionally, 60 survivors spent time with a RiverBend counselor to talk about their spiritual, emotional and family support needs.

A cancer diagnosis can be life changing, not only affecting you physically but also emotionally and, sometimes, financially. RiverBend Cancer Services is a local non-profit organization whose primary goal is to assist those who are fighting some of the hardest battles of their lives by providing financial assistance, advocacy services and emotional support. Donations, grants, and fundraising allow RiverBend to provide cancer patients in St. Joseph County with much needed supplies free of charge, such as medical equipment and nutritional supplements, which otherwise might not be available. Also available free of charge is a wig salon where a selection of wigs and supplies are provided to women going through chemotherapy treatments. RiverBend's licensed mental health counselor provides individualized counseling and support groups to deal with anxiety, depression, stress management, lifestyle changes, coping and decision-making. Other services offered include a resource library where cancer patients can learn more about their disease, support groups for individuals, families, and caregivers, as well as educational events such as *Breakthrough: Changing the Way You Think About*

*Cancer*, where research-based insight is explained in a free and open-to-the-public event.

I started at RiverBend Cancer Services as an intern in 2007 during the summer between my junior and senior year at Saint Mary's. Going into the internship, I felt inexperienced and undecided as to what I wanted to do "when I grew up." Graduation seemed far away, so I went into the job thinking two things: "I need a summer job and I need to do something good for someone else." Little did I know that *this* was what my future had in store! I joined the team at RiverBend full-time the month after graduation in 2008 with help from the Lilly Foundation grant through the Saint Mary's Career Center. I am the Program & Development Assistant, which means my responsibilities are divided between administrative support for patient services, such as support group and educational programs as well as special events planning and fundraising, such as RiverBend's annual *Jazz on the Terrace* fundraiser.

Graduating with a degree in Sociology from Saint Mary's College has undoubtedly helped me in the non-profit business world, as it has provided me with a superior background in understanding and communicating with the public on both a personal and professional level. I have taken many key concepts from my SMC sociology classes and used them in my daily interaction with peers and the general public. I am proud to be a Saint Mary's College Sociology alumna and am confident that my degree has changed my life so that I may work to change other's lives as well.

## Find us on Facebook!

The Sociology Department now has a Facebook group! Find us and join at: **SMC Sociology**



## Share your stories!

E-mail Dr. Susan Alexander at [salexand@saintmarys.edu](mailto:salexand@saintmarys.edu) and let us know what you are up to!

# Sociology Club News

The Saint Mary's Sociology Club is very excited to be a recognized club again this year! We are currently planning an awesome Sociology Week that will take place February 8th-12th. The new club officers are Sarah Rompola (president), Colleen Lowry (vice-president), Carly Zagaroli (secretary), Nichole Galullo (treasurer), and Nori Drach (student representative). Our club advisor is Professor Carrie Erlin this year.



provide assistance for staff at Saint Mary's College in times of need. In previous years the club has sold sweatpants to raise money, this year we are contemplating some other exciting options such as picture frames or coffee mugs.

There are some lectures of interest coming up and soon there will be monthly meetings for anyone interested in the club! Monthly meetings will include movie nights and

The Sociology Club will again this year fundraise for the CommUnity Fund. The CommUnity Fund was created by sociology alumna Chelsea Gulling (05) to

discussion, service projects, and gatherings to get to know majors/minors and professors better! Look forward to hearing more about sociology happenings

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