Q&A feature: What are we TEACHING now? With Prof. Gerry Veenstra Sociology of Soccer

You are teaching a course on the sociology of soccer. How is soccer sociological?

Soccer (and sports in general) is part of the social world and according to all sorts of sociologists there is work that can be investigated in the world of soccer: power and corruption, racism, gender inequality, the interplay between agency and structure, violence, order and spontaneity, and so forth. Pick any sociological concept and I’ll bet it can be applied to soccer.

You are a fan of soccer and play yourself. Do you ever apply sociology when you are playing or watching the game?

I absolutely love soccer! I watch every match featuring Manchester United or Vancouver Whitecaps FC that I possibly can, and I play league or pickup soccer every weekend. Most of the time I am consumed by the game and leave my sociological self behind, but every now and then, I find myself being a sociologist again. For example, I cannot help but note the racialized language occasionally applied by television commentators (by way of terms like ‘athleticism’ or ‘pace and power’ applied to certain players), or the various masculinities portrayed by my teammates and I in pickup soccer.

What reading(s) on the sociology of soccer would you recommend?

I love Richard Giulianotti’s 2002 article on spectator identities; it categorizes me as a fan of Manchester United (I support the club from a distance but have a strong emotional attachment to the team) and a supporter of the Whiteshirts (my emotional attachment to the team is strong and I am embedded in local fan culture), and also identifies the qualifications for club identification in terms of support and affiliations with clubs by way of the notion of ‘fanfare’. I also quite like Grant Farrow’s 2002 autobiographical article about his lifelong love affair with Liverpool FC that began when he was 7 years old living in South Africa.

What other courses do you teach?

I regularly teach undergraduate and graduate courses in social statistics and an undergraduate course on the social determinants of health.

LIFE ON CAMPUS By Neil Armitage (Lecturer)

Knitting with Neil materialized literally in the making – Armitage offered a drop-in learn-to-knit session as part of UBC’s Student Wellness Month. Fingers were fast and fingers werey fiddling. Thrive! Neil had just returned to himself after taking classes at Urban Yarns to Point Grey. After getting the basics down, he was amazed at how he found knitting both relaxing and energizing, quickly forgetting all the drooped stitches on the way.

When he informed the knitting store of his plans to help students learn to knit, they kindly gifted him yarn to get started, and Knitting with Neil was born. This has now become a regular monthly event in the Learning Lounge, an open pavilion on the third floor of the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre, where Neil along with other faculty regularly conduct workshops. It is a regular office hours knitting that Neil offers. He is joined by residents, staff and faculty, with regular appearances by staff from the Equity and Inclusion Office, Arts IST, and the UBC Knitting and Sewing Club.

Neil has found it great rest-bite in the hectic schedule of term and has witnessed how it provides students, staff and faculty a chance to connect beyond the everyday of the on campus at UBC.

Plastic Bags: A Sociological Perspective By Emily Huddart Kennedy (Assistant Professor)

At this point, we’ve likely all seen images of floating “islands” of garbage in our oceans. National Geographic states that each year, roughly 18 billion pounds (over 8 million tons) of plastic enters the ocean. But isn’t this a problem for engineers to solve? What could a sociologist tell us about plastic bags?

When it comes to understanding any environmental problem, from plastic pollution to greenhouse gas emissions, I find the concepts of “dioporportionality” and “the individualization of environmental responsibility” to be insightful. In environmental sociology, the idea of disproportionality was developed by William Freudenburg (2005). It explains that typically, a small number of actors. So, while it’s a worthwhile step to say no to plastic bags at the grocery store, it’s important to remember that you are a relatively small part of the problem. This reflection can help us to avoid thinking that plastic pollution is an individual problem that demands individual solutions, what Michael Maniates’ terms, individualization of environmental responsibility. An example of individualization that I find particularly compelling is Braun and Traore’s (2015) research demonstrating how female shoppers in markets in Mali are blamed for plastic waste. The authors show us that the individualization of responsibility for plastic bag pollution is the result of policies and programs that call attention to how globalization is negatively impacting the local environment while simultaneously widening the scope of services provided to deal with these socio-ecological impacts.

What does all of this mean in the domain of plastic bags? Well, it is positive that so many people are trying to avoid plastic and that there are engineers designing alternatives to plastic. But with a sociological gaze, we are better equipped to notice that the greater responsibility to address this environmental problem should be placed on the companies that profit from disposable plastics and on our elected representatives who have the power to demand more sustainable solutions to the seemingly simple task of getting consumer goods from one place to another.

Interesting reading on the topic:


RECENT AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS - at a glance

Graduate Students

PhD Student D. Kyle Sutherland receives the Arts Graduate Research Award.

PhD Student Amanda Arba in Ocean Memorial Award.

PhD Student Kaitlyn Laff receives the Arts Graduate Research Award.

PhD Student Jennifer Adams in the Public Scholar’s Initiative (PSI) Award.

PhD Student Hazel Hollingdale in the Wye Fox International Fellowship.

Incoming M.A. Student, Sigi Xiao, is a finalist in the SSHRC’s 2019 Storytellers Challenge

Undergraduate Students

Vahid Rusli publishes an article in The International Journal of Sport and Social Issues.

Kenny Wong receives the Pacific Sociological Association Undergraduate Student Paper Award, as well as the Faces of Today Award at the Student Leadership Conference in UBC.

Veronica Cho selected as a Wesbrook Scholar and is the recipient of the HSCC Emerging Leaders Scholarship.

Alex Chow receives the Katherine Breaux Arts Scholarship.

WHO IS VISITING? Jeronimo Muniz

Jeronimo Muniz is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil. He obtained his PhD from the University of Wisconsin, Madison and he serves as the Director of the Center of Quantitative Research in Social Sciences (CERPOS) and also as coordinator of the oldest Program in Quantitative Training (similar to Michigan’s ICSPR Summer Course) in Brazil, MCO.

He came to UBC to collaborate with sociology faculty member Wendy Roth. His main research employs quantitative methods and empirical simulations to understand the construction of racial “realities” from predefined analytical categories. He has shown that geographic, taxonomic, sampling and temporal uncertainties may affect our understanding of racial inequality and stratification through variations in the measurement of race and skin color. Muniz describes his visit to UBC as far as, “Sheer poetry. The UBC campus provides the perfect milieu to do research and enjoy life. I come here to develop one project and started five new ones.”

Martin Fuller

Martin Fuller is a sociologist at the Technische Universität Berlin (Berlin Institute of Technolo)

gy. Martin chose to be a visiting scholar at UBC because UBC is his alma mater: He graduated with a BA in Sociology in 2006. From here, he went on to get his PHD at the University of Cambridge. He is currently a sociology faculty member Tom Kempke when Tom was a visiting scholar at the Berlin Institute of Technology.

About visiting UBC, Martin says that “after working in central Berlin for the past years, I appreciate being able to walk in the Wilderness or visit the ocean in the middle of a workday.” His main research interests are in cultural and urban sociology, looking at the intersections of the two in case studies of contemporary art, housing and urban design. His recent research looks at a case study of the participatory planning of a residential building in north east housing, architecture and space home.

SOCI-FILX Can’t find anything on Netflix? Why not watch one of our Distinguished Speaker Series; a set of seminars featuring various scholars from around the world who have come to UBC to present their research. View our latest releases:

- Richard York (University of Oregon) - A Critical Perspective on Energy Transitions (April 2019)

- Arne Kilstedt (UNC Chapel Hill) - Precarious Livelihoods: Job insecurity and Well Being in Rich Democracies (March 2019)

- Guillermia Jasso (New York University) - From Fairness & Status to Parental Love & Toy Selection in Germany, Brazil, and the United States: Ethnic Percent Split & Segregation, Outliers/Insiders & Theft, Military Theater Location Rates: The Case for Basic Research (Martha Foschi Honorary Lecture—February 2019)

View all of our Distinguished Speaker Series lecture on our website:
https://sociology.ubc.ca/news-events/speaker-series/