Sociological (Re)imaginings of Anorexia: Monsters, Mirage and Magic (Emily Barko)

“To be haunted and write from that location...is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located.” –Avery Gordon in Stephen Pfohl (2008: 37) My eating disorder was not an entry into the social world, but an exit. Accordingly, while personal experience that is incongruous with a presumed socio-cultural trend at large does not utterly negate the identified script, (i.e. as supposed trend), it does, at the very least, call into question the accepted ubiquitous reality and utility of this shared understanding (in so many professional eating disorder research, academic and treatment arenas). That is, in contrast to a number of prominent socio-culturally–focused eating disorder (ED) etiologies that largely interpret eating disorders (EDS) as an attempted means to gain social accolades (so that commodification of a hegemonic Ideal body is equated with rewards), such as: male attention, peer group status elevation, career advancement, etc. (e.g. Hesse-Biber, 2007; Kilbourne 1992; Wolf 1991), which most often mirror (white-raced, upper-classed, woman-gendered, hetero-sexed) dominant cultural US values for doing gender (and presumably doing anorexia)—an alternate way to interpret ED motivations is as a challenge to (and not a fostering of) this status quo. Alternatively, an ED, particularly AN (anorexia nervosa), becomes a vehicle to distance oneself from dominant cultural games “she” (i.e. in accord with the female gendered script of AN) would rather not play. In effect, she, as the anorectic, employs her ED as a means to write new rules for an alternative social script— in place of any sanctification of the status quo.

Child Removal Initiatives’ Attacks on, and Contributions to Biological Determinism (Julia Bates)

This paper asks how child removal initiatives’ labeling of children during the Industrial Era, reinforced and challenged theories of biological determinism? It uses two cases, the removal of Native American children to off-reservation boarding schools, and the placing out of New York City immigrant children to Midwestern families, to examine how institutional efforts to assimilate racially marginalized children both challenged and reinforced biologically deterministic theories of race and gender. I use textual analysis of memoirs, and institutional documents to argue that discursive categories, rooted in gender and racial power hierarchies, were used by child removal initiatives to argue for the adaptability and assimilation of some children into the nation, while excluding others. My paper connects research on the categorization of peoples in U.S. civil discourse, to theories of nationalism as a form of “exclusionary cohesion”. It shows how processes of institutional labeling symbolically challenge or reinforce biological determinism, and empower or alienate groups from processes of national assimilation. This study contributes to theories of nationalism, institutional labeling, and race and gender.

The Sounds of Silence: A Structural Analysis of Academic "Writer's Block" (Lara Birk)

Academic "writer’s block" is a problem that can cause profound dread and produce concrete negative consequences for afflicted students, such as failing grades, diminished confidence, jettisoned career aspirations, or the inability to graduate. As widespread as writing blocks are, they have only rarely been
taken seriously as a topic of scholarship in the academic literature (Hjortshoj 2001), and in those cases, scholars have only conceived of writing blocks as a psychological or neurological problem. Based on 44 in-depth interviews with a diverse range of students experiencing acute and often paralytic difficulties with academic writing, my dissertation research reflects the ways in which what appears to be a “private trouble” is also a “public issue” with stark consequences for individuals caught in the cross-hairs of certain structural burdens. All the subjects perceived writing as a high stakes performance, wherein their inability to write represents an instance of “choking” in the face of these high stakes. Nevertheless, students experience these blocks in distinct ways depending on their social class in particular. For students from working class backgrounds, writing block is often an expression of cultural capital disadvantage in which students are frustrated in their attempts to honor their parents’ sacrifices through academic achievement. In contrast, for many upper middle class students, writing block is an expression of status anxiety in which students’ paralyzing perfectionism threatens to put their structural advantage at risk. As the first sociological study of academic writing blocks, my dissertation contributes to and extends the literature on social reproduction in higher education by documenting the class origins of students’ writing blocks.

**Birth Visionaries: An Examination of Unassisted Childbirth (Lauren Brown)**

What are women’s motivations for choosing unassisted childbirth and what is the lived experience of unassisted childbirth? I explored these questions through nine in-depth interviews and a grounded theory data analysis. Through the lens of these women’s experiences, the hegemonic way of doing birth in America is made problematic; what lies beneath it is a complex web of epistemological assumptions of the dominant culture in the United States and their institutionalization into medical standards and the law. For thinkers who are committed to the social construction of reality, there is growing movement to move beyond the work of deconstructing constructions and to begin creating new ways of being that challenge oppressive hegemonic norms. Women who have unassisted childbirth are doing exactly that. These women’s experiences subvert many of our “taken-for-granted” beliefs about the female body, nature, medicine, technology, and of our ways of being and knowing. This exploration of UC pushes the limits of what is possible and impossible in birth (*and life*). The stories of my interviewees provide not only a critical deconstruction of birth hegemony, but they serve to open conceptual space for discourses of marginalized knowledge. In directly challenging what they have experienced as an oppressive culture of birth, these women’s subversive and empowered subjectivities as UC mothers provide us with a way to understand modern operations of power and resistance.

**The Case for “Citizenship Regimes”**: Reconceptualizing Social Citizenship (Mehmet Cansoy)

The classical literature on citizenship saw social rights, and the accompanying social policies, as an inherent part of the social contract of political association with the state. In recent decades a new conception of social citizenship as a governance arrangement, distributing power and knowledge between the state, market and society, has gained traction. Yet this approach is limited in its focus because it fails to consider how the particulars of this governance arrangement affect the citizens. In this paper, I make the case that a more fluid concept of a “citizenship regime,” recognized both as a distributive governance arrangement and a relationship that is partly constitutive of the citizens, is
required to better understand social rights and social policies. I demonstrate how “citizenship regimes” operate to enact significantly different distributions of power and knowledge, alongside corresponding social subjectivities, through an analysis of social policies in Turkey. I identify three citizenship regimes operating in Turkey, divided along class lines. The regime targeting the poor maximizes the state’s control over power and knowledge and seeks to create visible and docile subjects. For the working- and middle-class, the citizenship regime includes a much greater market and social presence and seeks to engage people in these classes as self-disciplined consumers. Finally, the rich are faced with a citizenship regime that allows a regulated and subsidized market to dominate power and knowledge, and are expected to actively participate in this market as investors. These findings indicate that the nexus of relationships referred to as “citizenship” cannot be studied as a singular entity external to the actors it brings together. A new approach open to the existence of multiple “citizenship regimes,” at once both external and internal to the citizens, is needed.

An Emerging Eco-habitus: The Reconfiguration of High Cultural Capital Practices among Ethical Consumers (Luka Carfagna, Emilie Dubois, Connor Fitzmaurice, Thomas Laidley, Monique Ouimette, Juliet Schor and Margaret Willis)

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus describes a set of tastes and dispositions that operate according to a class homology—e.g. a working-class preference for utility, or a bourgeois orientation toward luxury. In the U.S. context and broadly consistent with Bourdieu’s research, Holt (1998) found that American high cultural capital (HCC) consumers were characterized by their cosmopolitanism, idealism, connoisseurship, and affinity for the exotic and authentic. In this article, we revisit the characteristics of HCC taste using ‘conscious consumers’ to illustrate the encorporation of environmental sustainability principles into upper-class habitus. Using both quantitative survey data of self-described conscious consumers as well as four qualitative case studies, we argue that conscious consumers are heavily HCC and that their tastes have indeed shifted since the mid-1990s. We show that on a number of dimensions—cosmopolitanism, idealism, and relation to manual labor—the new articulation privileges the local, material and manual, yet is still largely emblematic of the underlying logic of class homology. We conclude by arguing that these shifts are a direct consequence of sustainability discourses within HCC circles.

International Students in the US: Case Study of Pakistani Graduate Students Studying in the United States of America (Maheen Haider)

The research explores the implications of the US culture on Pakistani graduate students studying in the US. It investigates how the students navigate through the US culture while adhering to their own identities based on their gender and intergenerational differences? Qualitative methods have been deployed and twenty-eight life history interviews have been conducted across the students from both F1 and J1 visa categories, while maintaining the gender ratio. The duration of their stay spans over a period of 6 months to 5 years. The project explores the mechanisms adopted by the students to navigate through the different elements of the educational and social experiences during their stay in the US, from arrival to the pre assimilation phase and analyzes their ongoing interaction with the US society.
Prison as Crime School: Towards a Cultural Capital Model of Recidivism (Liam Martin)

Sociological research on the causes of mass incarceration focuses on the macro-level drivers of increases in the prison population (i.e., Beckett, 1997, Garland, 2001, Wacquant, 2009), but pays little attention to the social processes that reproduce this system by creating recidivism as a systemic feature of contemporary prisons. The last nationwide study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that over two-thirds of those released from prison are back behind bars within three years (Langan & Levin, 2002). I develop a cultural capital model of recidivism, based on ethnographic research at a halfway house and life histories with former prisoners who have experienced repeated cycles of imprisonment, release and return. Prisons not only close-off access to legitimate forms of cultural capital, but are crowded with men and women holding an abundance of “street capital” – skills and knowledges that bring status and income in the street. These conditions encourage the accumulation of street capital inside, which in turn increases the logic of criminal activity upon release. Developing this theoretical framework, I also extend research in the sociology of culture that examines the non-dominant cultural capital held by marginalized groups (Thorton, 1996, Carter, 2003, 2005).

Race, Gender and Issues of Self-Disclosure for Black Female-White Male Intimate Couples (Marya Mtshali)

Interviews with 20 members of Black female-White male intimate couples were conducted and, utilizing a grounded theory approach, revealed multiple situations where members of these couples had to self-disclose to others that they were romantically involved with a person of a different race. Using the largest study sample to date of Black female-White male couples, I demonstrate how race and gender affect these unplanned and strategic self-disclosure events that members of these couples engage in, and how members of these couples make sense of these public inquires that are the remnants of our country’s racially-charged history. I argue that the ways in which privilege is uniquely distributed within these relationships -- where White men simultaneously possess racial and gender privilege and Black women possess neither -- makes these couples structurally and fundamentally different than other interracial couples, and, ultimately, exemplifies that race and gender matter in the experiences of interracial couples and how society-at-large views them. Therefore, it is pivotal that experiences of interracial couples are not generalized and that each race and gender pairing receives its own individualized study.

Does Parent-Adult Child Relationship Quality Influence Depressive Symptoms in Adults Following the Death of a Parent? (Jeffrey E. Stokes)

Parents and children continue to have important ties to one another throughout adulthood, and throughout adulthood. This study focuses on the common bereavement experience of the loss of a parent during adulthood, and examines the respective roles played by parent-child relationship quality, marital status and satisfaction, and gender in affecting adult children’s depressive symptoms following loss. The data are garnered from the Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG), a longitudinal survey of 3+ generation families living in Southern California in 1971. The sample analyzed here includes adult children who lost one or both parents between survey waves (N = 420). Analyses indicate that a higher quality relationship with a deceased parent is related to fewer post-bereavement depressive symptoms following the death of a father but not the death of a mother, and that a higher quality relationship with
a surviving parent is related to fewer post-bereavement depressive symptoms following the death of a father but not the death of a mother. These results indicate that relational factors are crucial to understanding bereavement outcomes, and that gender is a powerful but complex influence.

Natural Allies or Necessary Enemies? Identifying Barriers to Partnerships between New England Sustainable Farmers and Farm Animal Protection Organizations (Liz Tov)

Although the first-known animal protection legislation was passed over 300 years ago, it would not be until the late 20th century that animal welfare issues would gain widespread public attention. In particular, the U.S. has seen a recent and rapidly growing awareness of the inhumane living and slaughtering conditions of animals raised for human consumption. While farmers and animal protection organizations (APOs) can almost always be found in contention with one another, they may in fact share mutually beneficial agendas. For example, legislation ensuring higher standards for animal welfare on factory farms, a key goal of many APOs, is potentially in the economic interest of sustainable farmers. Through semi-structured interviews with New England farmers practicing sustainable agriculture, this ongoing research seeks to understand how these farmers view APOs and farm animal welfare, and also to better understand the norms and culture of such farmers. Several key findings can be reported thus far. While some farmers support farm animal protection legislation in theory, all express wariness at the potential cost of additional regulations. Also, while interviewees express a great deal of respect for other farmers in general, they nevertheless feel they have little in common with large-scale farmers in the Midwest, nor that they are well represented by the national Farm Bureau, suggesting a potential opening for alliances with local APOs. A significant barrier to such partnerships, however, stems from the fact that farmers’ impressions of APOs are based almost entirely on negative encounters with PETA. Yet interviewees also offered a number of suggestions as to what APOs could do to build relationships with sustainable farmers, the most common proposal being to lend visible and concrete support to small farmers and the local food movement. I have tentatively concluded that the potential for political alliances between New England sustainable farmers and APOs exists, but would require a deeper appreciation for and understanding of farmers’ views and experiences. Were they to be achieved, however, productive partnerships between these social actors could expedite farm animal welfare agendas, solidify and broaden sustainable farmers’ foothold in the marketplace, and respond to growing consumer demand for responsible livestock practices.