

TEACHING IN SCIENCE AND CAREER FAIRS: AN APPLICATION USING DOLLS*

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SOCIOLOGISTS REGULARLY USE a variety of non-traditional techniques for teaching sociology (e.g., Alkhvist 1999; Laz 1996; Loewen 1991; Martinez 1994, 1998). Unique methods and materials connect with introductory students as well as more advanced students because the materials promote the utilization of sociological ideas and imagination (Laz 1996; Pence and Fields 1999; Scanlon and Feinberg 2000). Nontraditional presentations often incorporate cultural artifacts, particularly film, music or poetry, to illustrate more advanced sociological concepts, such as race, gender, and cultural analysis (Alkhvist 1999; Burton 1988; Martinez 1994, 1998; Moran 1999).

Yet most sociology teaching literature focuses on instruction in the familiar setting of the college classroom. There are occasional references to sociology education outside the collegiate setting, as in Segal, Segal, and Wattendorf's discussion of teaching in a military academy (1990); Gregory and O'Toole's description of teaching methodology in medical schools (1987); and Halsey's use of travel (1990). However, even these examinations occur primarily in classroom settings. Non-classroom locales require innovative methods of teaching, and middle school or high school career and science fairs provide just such venues.

The technique suggested here, the use of

folk dolls to gain an audience at a science or career fair, solves a teaching problem in a particular setting. As with all pedagogy, creatively reaching out to one's audience requires the teacher to know something about the audience and to make effective use of available tools. Science fairs tend to be oriented to younger students who are generally not yet conversant with the concepts of social structure or social psychology. Popular culture artifacts are often used as teaching tools to communicate sociological concepts, particularly when these ideas are new to the audience. This paper demonstrates the use of familiar objects, dolls, to pique interest in sociology in a fair setting.

The first part of the paper describes the science and career fair setting. Examples of the use of cultural artifacts as contributors to developing sociological understanding are discussed. The presentation, using dolls, is described with some background information on dolls included. Lastly, transferability of the method is considered and the experience is evaluated.

THE FAIR SETTING

The Fairs

Science fair and career fair settings are difficult places for social scientists to illustrate their disciplines, yet sociologists are increasingly asked to participate in such events. One example would be the Math Science Network's *Expanding Your Horizons in Science and Mathematics* (EYH) workshops designed to encourage girls to consider science- or math-based career options by exposing them to a wider variety of sciences and science careers than they might have considered otherwise. These workshops generally take place on college campuses but are focused on middle and high

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school girls (11 to 17 years of age). EYH combines presentations of science and math careers with demonstrations by chemists, physicists, biologists, mathematicians, and other scientists, including sociologists and anthropologists (Math Science Network 1999).

Another example of a science fair which incorporates sociological content is the *INTEL National Science and Engineering Fair* (ISEF). The ISEF is oriented to both middle school and high school students and includes categories for "behavioral and social science" and for "gerontology." These fairs primarily consist of student presentations of research projects, but demonstrations and displays by professional scientists are often included. The age range for students at ISEF fairs is from middle school through high school, although the social science categories are sometimes limited to middle-school-age students (e.g., Glick 1996, Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, 2000).

Finally, although unusual, a few school systems run social science fairs. Sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students in Georgia participate in local, regional, and statewide social science fairs designed to "broaden their minds and to explore techniques that will create competent independent thinkers for a new and evolving society" (Georgia Department of Education 1998:ii). The Georgia fairs are sponsored by the Georgia Department of Education and follow the traditional science fair format, but focus instead on history, anthropology, economics, sociology, psychology, and political science. As with ISEF, students are expected to do original research and present that research in the usual poster format (e.g., TRMS Social Science Fair 2000; Georgia Department of Education 1998). In each instance cited, professional scientists representing various disciplines are asked to give presentations.

Communication techniques required by the fair venue differ greatly from those used in the college classroom. First, the age of the participants (11 to 14 in the Georgia

case, 11 to 17 in the EYH and ISEF cases) is different than that of the usual sociology student. Secondly, the rules for science fairs and some career fairs specify poster displays. This visual stimulus of the student posters makes the visual content of professional displays critical. Third, and a problem perhaps felt most strongly by social scientists as compared to biology or physics researchers, is the difficulty of competing with fair displays that include tarantulas, guinea pigs, vinegar-and-baking-soda volcanoes, and other manipulable projects. One colleague asked: "What am I supposed to do, bring a juvenile delinquent, have him sit in a chair, and let people walk around him? That won't go over too well with parents."

Clearly, visual and hands-on displays are required to attract students to the display or presentation. At the same time, extensive written material will receive short shrift by fair visitors due to the attraction of other hands-on displays. Given the varying and younger ages of the students, hands-on materials are most likely to provide the best method of teaching concepts or content. For these reasons, reliance on nontraditional and primarily visual methods is imperative in the fair setting.

Pedagogy with Cultural Artifacts

Although there is an extensive literature on nontraditional teaching, using a physical object like a doll in an instructional setting is relatively unusual. The hands-on aspect, however, is less rare. For example, Hamlin and Jansen (1987) indicated that hands-on learning provided an excellent tool for teaching as it assisted students in thinking critically and clearly (see also Mayer 1986; Tipton and Tiemann 1993). A long tradition of pedagogy employing cultural artifacts of varying types includes Martinez's (1994) application of rap lyrics to illustrate differences in the experience of racial and ethnic groups and Alkhvist's (1999) use of heavy metal music to teach cultural analysis. Laz (1996) uses science fiction to stimulate the sociological imagination. Scanlon and Feinberg (2000) analyze themes from *The Simp-*

sons in introductory classes, and Davidson (1987) draws on ethnic jokes to introduce themes of race.

Unfortunately, each of these examples, though contributing to active learning, was oriented toward the college or university classroom, not a younger audience. Films and music could provide the visual or aural enticement required in the fair setting, but the time required to present such material limits effectiveness considering that the fair audience itself is mobile, strolling among a number of booths. The fair setting is far more fluid and less structured than a classroom, requiring that the "message" be gotten across in a short period of time. The teaching process at career or science fairs is as much about capturing an audience's attention as it is about communicating information and ideas.

THE DOLL EXHIBIT

The Exhibit

To address the challenge of explaining sociology and to show simultaneously that social scientists study everyday life, folk dolls from around the world were utilized at an *Expanding Your Horizons* workshop. Taking into account the age and gender of the students, and considering the need for a hands-on type of demonstration, 15 dolls were collected from friends who had traveled to different regions of the world, with a Barbie doll included to represent the United States. The project was intended to provide a short, manipulable lesson on the nature of sociological thinking by characterizing aspects of the cultures that created each doll and by illustrating sociological principles demonstrated by the dolls.

Dolls were arranged on a table with question-and-answer placards attached to each doll or set of dolls. The first placard simply described sociology and set the tone for examining social structure. Succeeding cards were intended to stimulate questions, and perhaps even critical thinking, by the students. These included references to how the manufacture of the dolls has changed

with increased modernization of the culture (from handmade to manufactured), how the colors and styles of dolls changed based on preferences of tourists, how the activities in which the dolls were engaged (sweeping, childcare) and the materials from which the dolls were made (spoons, clothespins) reflect gender-segregated divisions of labor, and how cultural and social class differences were reflected in the styles of dolls from different regions of countries. The commercially made doll, Barbie, was included with a set of her paraphernalia to illustrate differences in first- and third-world economic norms. In other words, when the toys from different cultures were displayed side by side, a variety of sociological concepts were also visually displayed.

The Content

A reproduction of an introductory card is provided in the Appendix. When girls asked about this card or about how dolls illustrate social life, they were asked to consider the kinds of toys boys and girls play with, reflecting Philippe Aries's (1962) observation that the objects children are expected to play with and how they play with them reflect adult visions of childhood. Since adults perceive childhood as a sort of boot camp for adulthood, the playthings adults provide for children guide socialization expectations for those children. To emphasize this connection, the girls viewing the exhibit were verbally asked to think about how toys become purveyors of cultural values and norms.

Another card introduced a Mexican straw doll holding a broom, an American clothespin doll carrying a baby and a basket, and a Costa Rican wire doll with a basket of fruit on her head. This card asked girls to consider what the dolls were doing. Most girls commented that "a woman's work is never done," and a few noted the dolls were working at the same types of jobs expected of U.S. wives and mothers. Another related card pointed out that all but the Barbie doll seemed to be fabricated from the tools of women's work. Some were made of food

such as corn husks, beans, or stalks of rice. Others were made from spoons, clothespins, and pieces of cloth leftover from dressmaking. Several dolls also carried smaller dolls on their backs or carried containers on their heads. In response to observing these dolls, one 11-year-old girl said: "Dolls teach children how women are supposed to act."

The Barbie doll elicited a wide range of comments from girls and was used to illustrate several points. Barbie had accessories, which the other dolls did not, implying differences in the economic origin of the dolls and, given Barbie's many different types of accessories (from professional gear to glamor articles to athletic and mothering gear), illustrating a broad range of possible roles for the doll. One girl commented she played "let's pretend" with Barbie and often played "house" but not necessarily any games suggested by the accessories. When asked what she thought the implications of playing house with Barbie might be in light of the other folk dolls, she volunteered that maybe girls learn some jobs early in life. She also suggested that "maybe Barbies teach girls to be grown-up."

Students were also directed to note that the dolls came from many countries around the world. Each, except the Barbie, was considered a *folk* doll, originally intended to be played with by the maker or by the maker's children. Yet these dolls had been purchased by tourists, and as such illustrated aspects of economic change. For example, Russian nesting dolls have changed coloration from the original bright red and black to newer, pastel shades, such as lavender or pale blue. Two nesting dolls were included in the display, one in the "original" colors and one made more recently. Most girls could easily see that the figure painted in gold and lavender was probably for tourists, while the one in the bright colors would be destined for local tastes. Students were asked to consider what this observation communicated about how global culture was changing local folkways.

In other words, these manipulable, everyday objects were used to begin conversations

that were sociological in tone. The conversations were then directed to encourage the girls to consider everyday objects in a broader, more social structural context, thus contributing to some understanding of sociology as a science that studies everyday life.

Evaluation

Qualitative responses to the presentation were described above. On a more quantitative note, it is useful to examine how other types of exhibits in the same EYH location were presented. Over several years, from 1995 to 1997, a variety of other types of presentations of sociological content were tried. The first utilized mapping software to show distributions of sociological variables. The second used posters with game show-type questions. Neither of these purely visual presentations attracted many students. When the mapping software was used, only one of 176 students stopped at the display to ask questions. The question and answer poster-type display, used two years in a row, did somewhat better, attracting just over a dozen students of the 150 in attendance in the first year and 14 students of 184 in the following year. However, clearly neither of these two methods worked. On the other hand, the doll display and questions resulted in approximately 150 visits to the display of a total of 180 girls in attendance at the workshop.

WHY DOLLS?

How Dolls Illustrate Sociological Concepts

Even a cursory search of literature, readers' guides, or full-text databases provided a remarkably wide range of sources on dolls. Information regarding dolls was found in sources for art history, hobbies, collecting, anthropological texts, feminist research, and popular literature. As shown above, dolls could symbolize a number of social structures. A history of doll making, for example, delineates sociological change brought on by the industrial revolution as well as illustrating aspects of mass culture formation. Home-made dolls, rag dolls or cloth

dolls stuffed with sawdust, straw or bran, were common in European and other societies prior to the 1800s. Early American dolls were made of thread spools, corn husks and corn cobs, apples, nuts, seeds, rope and the like, with vegetable dyes used to paint faces (Jailer 1990a). By the nineteenth century the production of dolls for sale had become increasingly common and the composition of dolls changed, with bodies and heads being fabricated in porcelain, bisque, or wood as well as cloth. As the industrial revolution changed the process of making other goods, it also changed doll making as mass production and assembly line production advanced around the turn of the century.

Illustrating the beginnings of mass culture, "personality dolls," or dolls that characterized a specific person, like a monarch or political leader, became wildly popular during the Victorian era. Probably these dolls were a way of capturing the likenesses of well-known figures in a time prior to television or widespread access to newspapers (Jailer 1990b). Yet the increasing popularity of personality dolls suggested increasing knowledge of larger, not just local, society. In the second half of the nineteenth century, magazines and newspapers began publishing paper-doll cutouts and doll making patterns depicting a wider range of personalities, including entertainers, socialites, and artists (Jailer 1989; Ware 1987).

Regarding socialization, it is instructive that dolls have historically portrayed adults, serving as models for what the child would become. In Europe during the mid-1800s, baby dolls appeared and increased in popularity over the next century. Popular authors argue that the baby doll's features, often including an oversized head and soft body, trigger innate mothering responses in both males and females (Lipson 1986). Baby dolls have been portrayed as prolonging childhood as opposed to Barbie, who foreshadows adult sexuality.

Whether dolls actually elicit mothering responses is arguable; however, it is likely that such a perspective on baby dolls is less

about hanging on to childhood than about the socialization of children to future roles (Lipson 1986). Examples in support of the latter thesis include the success of Cabbage Patch Kids dolls, who are adopted by the child and come complete with a birth certificate (Berg 1986). Adults cooperated with this perspective on dolls as "real" by baptizing Cabbage Patch Kids in churches and, in a separate instance, setting up a New Jersey summer camp to which children could send their dolls (Jacob, Rodenhauser, and Markert 1987). The price of the camp included a weekly letter home and a photo of the doll with his/her bunkmates.

Finally, the role of dolls in the diffusion of gender or racial attitudes has been well documented. In the case of gender, it is useful to note that dolls designed for boys, such as G.I. Joe or Superman, are called "action figures" because boys are not encouraged to play with "dolls"—a concept which suggests that the word "doll" is not gender neutral. As regards race, in *Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas*, the attorney for Brown, Thurgood Marshall, used the research of Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1939) on the preferences of black children for white dolls to support the case for school integration. Since the Clark's work, children's preferences for various colors of dolls or identification of different ethnicities of dolls as attractive have been examined extensively, especially in relation to self-esteem. The ethnicity of the dolls as black or white is not used to overtly transmit racial attitudes; rather, attitudes prevalent in the culture are assumed to be reflected in children's choice of play objects (Gopaul and McNicol 1995; also Wilkinson 1987).

Transferability to Other Settings

The use of dolls as described above was an approach developed specifically for handling the challenges of the fair as a teaching site. Certainly, dolls could also be used in other settings to illustrate sociological principles. The use of dolls to interest younger students seems obvious. Many high schools have sociology classes which tend to be heavily

focused toward the study of social psychology and/or criminology, and incorporating a sociology of dolls into the curriculum could broaden the course and the knowledge base it provides.

Perhaps of greater use is an examination of a sociology of dolls in introductory or even advanced college level classes to introduce the ways social constructs can be found in cultural objects, to introduce gender roles and their change over time, to illustrate developments of mass culture via changes in doll production, to illustrate changes in levels of economic development, or to serve as a topic for sociological research projects. Including a collection of action figures with other dolls has been shown profitable, although not in a pedagogical setting *per se*. Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, and Borowiecki (1999) have recently documented changes in male doll dimensions over time. For example, G.I. Joe's physique has grown more muscular and he has increasingly developed an angrier or tougher visage since 1970. Action figures of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles have also bulked up since their first introduction. Thus, action figures could be used to introduce questions about gender-specific messages implied by dolls.

Dolls carry an enormous amount of normative freight. That said, analyses of other, similarly burdened cultural objects would likely prove interesting. For example, a display of flags could be utilized to illustrate the way that meaning becomes attached to the symbol as an object of worship or an object for burning. Domesticated animals could be examined as beasts of burden or as food, as subjects for scientific research or as subjects for rescue *a la* the Animal Liberation Front, or as pets. Men's ties could be studied as status symbols and signatures of white collar work, and so on. Teaching sociology via such social objects is a graphic way of communicating sociology to groups with a variety of backgrounds and/or who might have little experience of social structure, while simultaneously illustrating how sociology can be seen in everyday life.

As a final comment, sociology is a disci-

pline of language and abstract concepts; however, dolls are both visual and tactile objects. The dolls communicate sociological concepts both visually and tangibly; as a result, the choice of language for both the written cards in the science fair and for the verbal interactions with the girls is perhaps less critical because the use of the object does much of the communication for the researcher.

Still, the issue of how the sociological concepts and language are communicated in this setting is important. In the instance of the science fair described here, "pre-testing" was done by having several conversations with a middle-school-aged girl. Although this pre-test sample of one student was certainly not representative, conversations with her about what she thought when she examined the dolls guided the choice of language used on the table cards.

Generally the language used on the cards, however, was an interpretation of the 10-year-old's remarks, not a verbatim use of her words. For example, Card 1 includes the phrase "social and economic circumstances" whereas the pre-tester's response was that "the dolls show how poor they are." Obviously, there was a need to strike a balance between the conceptual language of science and the practical, everyday language of kids. The solution to this dilemma was to ask the 10-year-old if the cards seemed clear. When the language was not clear to her, the card was reworked. (However, a few terms like "social and economic circumstances" seemed critical and were kept in the text. These terms were occasionally used as a springboard for conversation by asking fairgoers: "Do you know what that word means?") A similar pre-test of language would be in order if the uses of cultural artifacts were to be transferred to other settings with populations unlikely to be accustomed to the conceptual language of sociology.

CONCLUSIONS: TEACHING WITH SOCIAL ARTIFACTS

This article has discussed a teaching tool

used to manage a challenging teaching setting. Obviously science and career fairs and workshops are not the only places where the use of cultural objects or graphic manipulable displays might be helpful. One reviewer suggested that other settings where disciplines are asked to create displays to explain their subject matter, for example "major nights" or "open houses," would similarly benefit from the use of dolls, action figures, or other cultural objects. The setting of a noisy, crowded, visually stimulating environment means that the success of the technique is measured not so much by knowledge gained, but by the interest generated by the audience members. Once their attention is gained, then directing them to the ways the social objects illustrate sociological principles can be a graphic way of communicating sociology to students from a variety of backgrounds.

APPENDIX. DISPLAY CARDS

(Card 1, placed at beginning of display) The Sociology of Dolls: Sociology is the study of human groups and culture. This includes the social, cultural, economic, and technological circumstances of a society. Dolls provide insights into many aspects of human cultures. Dolls can tell you a great deal about the *social and economic* circumstances of the place where they come from. These dolls are from many countries around the world. Each is considered a *folk* doll. Folk dolls are originally hand made to be played with by children. Since these are folk dolls, they show a great deal about the people who made them. Given that many folk dolls are now made to sell to tourists, can you tell which dolls are for tourists?

(Card 2, associated with two Russian nesting dolls) These two dolls are both Russian Pysanka dolls. One is in the 'original' colors, made for Russian children to play with; one has been made specifically for the tourist trade. Can you tell which is which? What makes you think so? (The original colors are the bright reds, yellows and greens. The tourists like the pastel lavenders and gilt, hence, the tourist dolls are the pastel colors.) What does it mean that people are selling these types of dolls to tourists? What does it tell you about the economic situation of the countries from which these dolls come? These particular dolls are handmade, not produced in a factory. How does

this compare with Barbie dolls? What does it say about the nature of industrial production in Russia?

(Card 3, associated with a Mexican straw doll with a broom; an American clothespin doll carrying a baby and a basket; and a Costa Rican wire doll with a basket of fruit on her head) What else do you notice about these dolls? Hint: what are the dolls *doing*? Notice how many of the other dolls in the display are working, and what type of work each is doing. What does this tell you about the roles expected of women?

(Card 4 is associated with an Indonesian doll. The doll is made entirely from dried rice stalks, each complete with the head of the grain still attached. The figure has a skirt, a hat, arms, legs, and a head.) This doll is not a doll at all. Can you guess what it is made from? What is its purpose? This 'doll' is made from rice stalks and is burned during the rice planting to ensure a good harvest. In many Muslim countries, there are few 'dolls' since Islam discourages the making of images.

(Card 5, associated with an American rag doll, a doll made from a wooden kitchen spoon, a cornhusk doll, and a clothespin doll) Look carefully at these folk dolls of a type often made for children until about 1940. What materials are they made from? Again, these are the tools of women's work, a spoon, a clothespin, a corn husk, and pieces of cloth leftover from dressmaking. Realize also that in U.S. culture, women usually care for children and make dolls. Thus, the folk dolls teach children about their future work.

(Card 6, associated with two dolls, one a clay and cloth doll from Gujarat, India, and the second, a rag doll from Calcutta, India) These dolls are both from India although one is from the western and one from the eastern part of the country. Do you think the culture of each region is the same? The dramatic difference in the dolls reflects the distinct culture of each region. The women who made each doll speak the same language but the *dialects* of east and west are so different that the people who made each doll cannot talk to each other.

(Card 7 is associated with a large doll on which eight small children are climbing and sitting.) This doll from Mexico is called a 'story teller'. She is telling stories to the children sitting on her! The story teller is the person who passes on information about culture and history.

(Card 8 is associated with a doll from Bali carrying a pot made from a film canister on her head; another doll has a basket and is carrying food in it. This card is intended to summarize the seven cards that have preceded it.) So what does

this collection tell you? Women work; they are assigned the hard work of food gathering and child care; they often make toys out of 'found objects' like the film canister/pot; and they pass culture on to children.

(*Card 9 is associated with Barbie and a sample of Barbie accessories.*) So, what does the Barbie doll tell you about American culture? Is she hand-made or manufactured? What do her wardrobe and accessories suggest to you? What kinds of work does it appear that Barbie does? Many of Barbie's accessories are for sports—do you think that any of the dolls from other parts of the world play sports? What does this suggest about U.S. society? What other things do you think when examining Barbie? Barbie has cars, she works, and has many material goods. She also has many fancy clothes that presumably make her very attractive to men (or boy dolls). In some ways, then, Barbie is much like the folk dolls that portray women working, yet Barbie has the option of non-traditional activities as well. She has sports equipment, she does not appear to have children, and most of her jobs seem to be white collar. What does this suggest to you about the differences between developed and developing societies?

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