

Society for Cross-Cultural Research Newsletter

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Future Meetings

Back by popular demand, the 1999 meeting will be held in Santa Fe. Our meeting with TASP was so successful that we have decided to meet with them again in 1999. Due to scheduling problems for the hotel our usual date was changed. The meeting will be held at La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe. Registration, etc., will begin on Wednesday, February 3, and the meeting will run through Sunday morning, February 7. (paper and symposium forms at end of newsletter.) A splendid museum devoted to the paintings of Georgia O'Keefe has opened since we last met in Santa Fe.

New Orleans has been selected as the site for the millennium meeting. Negotiations with hotels are underway.

Message from the President-Elect

Garry Chick

The 1999 meeting will be held at La Fonda hotel in Santa Fe, New Mexico, from February 3 through the 7th. This is two weeks earlier than we have been meeting but the change will allow us to reduce our costs

from what we would incur at the later time period. Specifically, the hotel offered us meeting rooms at no cost, as opposed to \$100 each per day, if we agreed to move to the earlier dates. So making the change seemed worthwhile.

La Fonda is located on the Sante Fe plaza and has the most hotel meeting space in the city. It is itself an historic landmark and is surrounded by historic churches as well as museums, shops, galleries, and restaurants. The hotel is currently undergoing a major renovation that, I am assured, will be completed this spring. The cost for rooms, single or double, for the meeting will be \$128, a figure that is substantially below their standard rate. Because the hotel is so centrally located in Santa Fe and so many fine restaurants are available in the city, we are planning to hold only a banquet in the hotel, rather than including luncheons as we did in St. Petersburg. Though there is a small airport at Santa Fe, the city is best reached by flying to Albuquerque and then either taking the Shuttle Jack bus service or by renting a car.

The paper submission and abstract form and the organized symposium form are included in this newsletter. The hotel registration form, along with the other forms, will be included in the fall newsletter. The deadline for submissions for the 1999 conference is October 1, 1998. Please submit your abstract on the included form as well as on a diskette (PC or Macintosh).

I also wish to briefly address an issue related to the conference. At the 1996 meeting in San Antonio I orchestrated a round table discussion on "the units of culture." Susan Abbott had suggested that we generate a couple of round tables and the units of culture question was something that interested me and I felt that it would evoke discussion.

It turned out to be quite successful. My basic question was whether, in cultural evolution, selection, diffusion, and so on, there is some unit of cultural information analogous to the gene. In the past, anthropologists referred to units such as "traits," "themes," "beliefs," "patterns," and so on. More recently, Lumsden and Wilson have suggested the "cultorgen" and others, following Richard Dawkins, favor the "meme." Several questions exist with respect to the unit of culture notion. First, does the concept of units of cultural information make any ontological sense and is such a concept of value in research? Second, which, if any, of these particular units has merit and how can they be operationalized in research? Finally, if they lack merit, what, if anything, should be used in their place? As it turned out, the group of 15 or so people who attended the session had a lively discussion of these and other issues.

Buoyed by that experience, I decided that it would be good to have a meeting session somewhere devoted to the topic and I contacted several anthropologists who I felt both knew something about it and would have something interesting to say. I soon rounded up a half dozen people and one of them talked me into putting together a session proposal for the 1997 meeting of the American Anthropological Association to be held in Washington, DC, last November. I dutifully put the proposal package and sent it off. I hoped that we would get a good day and time for the session.

I was astounded when I received a letter from the conference chair indicating that the session had been rejected. Evidently a couple hundred other sessions had been judged to have more merit than the one that I proposed and assembled despite the fact that several respected and senior anthropologists, including Kim Romney, a member of the National Academy of Sciences, were among my group. I was disappointed that the session was rejected but not because I was anxious to go to the AAA meeting and present. In fact, I find large meetings to be of much less value and interest to me personally than smaller ones, such as the

SCCR conference. I was disappointed because the rejection of the session appeared to me and my session-mates as a rejection of science, scientific methods, and a scientific perspective by the major organization of American anthropologists. This suspicion was supported when I received the program wherein the sessions and papers that had been accepted were listed. Social determinism, reflexivity, and other forms of navel-gazing and political correctness were in full bloom. I did not feel welcome, I saw few sessions of any interest to me, and I did not attend the meeting.

While this tale may sound like sour grapes, I am very concerned with the issue of science vs. anti-science in anthropology. I think that Susan Abbott's presidential address in St. Petersburg reflected the issue in the membership statistics that she presented with respect to the declining percentage and increasing age of anthropologists in the SCCR. While one certainly does not need to be an obdurate positivist to be a member of the SCCR, cross-cultural research entails comparison and a concern over the extreme relativism that seems to be part and parcel of many current social constructionist approaches to social science. My guess is that while we in the SCCR do not practice much in the way of Comte's social physics, we do at least strive for some of the traditional goals of science, including objectivity, replicability, falsifiability, theory production, and so on. We realize that true objectivity is impossible but, on the other hand, becoming a social scientist should not be like descending into Dante's Inferno, where all hope must be abandoned.

On a positive note, the emerging field of evolutionary psychology seems to have picked up many of the pieces discarded by anthropology and run quite well with them. In addition, many biological anthropologists are now casting their lot with this group, rather than with their cultural counterparts. While I was organizing the proposal for the AAA session on the units of culture, a book appeared (*Human by Nature: Between Biology and the Social Sciences*, Weingart, Mitchell, Richerson, and Maasen, eds., 1997) containing a chapter titled, "Units of culture: Types of transmission," by Weingart, Boyd, Durham, and Richerson. I am pleased, of course, that someone else regards the topic to be worth pursuing but, again, I am disappointed that the American Anthropological Association apparently does not.

My original intent was to have a units of culture session at an SCCR meeting. So, I have asked the individuals who were to be part of the units of culture session at the AAA to assemble at the 1999 meeting of the SCCR in Santa Fe and present their work. I am certain that they will find the atmosphere most congenial. In addition, I plan to contact several of the leading figures in evolutionary psychology and invite them to join us in an additional units of culture session, another session, or to simply submit abstracts on their own. I hope that some of these individuals can be persuaded to join the SCCR. Last year, Uwe focused on healing, therapy, counseling, stress, and related topics as a conference theme. For 1999, I would like to focus on the measurement of culture as a general theme, one that I think will be of interest to both current members and prospective members. I hope that we will have a variety of sessions, roundtables, and other discussion relevant to this topic. Other topics are, of course, welcome.

Finally, The Association for the Study of Play (TASP) is again planning to meet with us. I think that there is general agreement that the combined meeting in St. Petersburg went extremely well and that the two groups are highly congenial. As of that meeting, I think that only Andy Miracle, John Loy, and I were members of both groups. I hope that some members of the two groups were persuaded to join the other on the basis of the meeting and I trust that the joint meeting in Santa Fe will be as successful as St. Petersburg.

Highlights of the 1998 SCCR Meeting

The meeting in St. Petersburg was particularly successful, despite an unfinished dining room and an El Nino downpour that flooded parts of the hotel. The joint meeting with TASP allowed for the easy reservation of conference rooms and exchange of ideas.

Institute for International and Cross-Cultural Psychology

St. Francis College, Brooklyn, NY 11201, U.S.A.

The Institute for International and Cross-Cultural Psychology (IICCP) was founded on March 6th, 1998. Its mission encompasses the following objectives: to sponsor research and publications in international and cross-cultural psychology; to promote, develop, and implement workshops, symposia, lectures, and conferences at St. Francis College; to involve students in cross-cultural research and the institute's programs; to foster a sense of involvement in and appreciation of the cultural richness of the St. Francis College community; and to create network ties with other interested psychological institutions around the world.

Some Activities for 1998-1999

Sponsor the editing of *World Psychology*

Sponsor preparation of edited volumes on *The Family and Family Therapy in International Perspective* (1998), *Human Development in International Perspective* (1999), *Culture, Therapy, and Healing*

Sponsor research projects on The Development of Moral Reasoning in Poland (in progress); The Development of Moral Reasoning in Cyprus (1998-1999)

Sponsor the stay of a Visiting Scholar from Ochanomizu University, Tokyo at the Institute (1998-1999)

Sponsor symposia, lectures, Community Day, and other events at the College

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