

## Inciting sociological thought by studying the deadhead community: Engaging publics in dialogue

By: Rebecca Adams

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### **Abstract:**

We need to pay more attention to the process of being sociologists and less attention to rates of productivity. To support this statement, I present a case study of the processes in which I have been involved while studying Deadheads, fans of the former rock band, the Grateful Dead. To avoid negative sanctioning, I proceeded slowly with this research and therefore had time to engage students, the media, and Deadheads in sociological dialogue. As a result, my teaching, ability to communicate sociological ideas, opportunities to incite sociological thought, and data were enhanced. To fulfill the promise of sociology "to revolutionize how people think" (Johnson 1997), we need to engage publics in dialogue and to establish routine rewards for doing so.

### **Article:**

After Jerry Garcia's death in August of 1995, 150 Deadheads wrote to me about their experiences grieving for him. Although these letters were chiefly interesting to me because they were filled with expressions of fear of loss of community and because Deadheads were mourning a public figure as a member of their family or at least as a personal friend, another theme stood out. Jerry was very busy after his death. He visited Deadheads in their dreams or communicated with them in creative symbolic ways, reassuring them about his well-being and their future survival.

Well, I have to admit I was curious about whether Jerry would communicate with me. Just when I had decided I was not on his list, I dreamed that I was attending a Bob Dylan concert in a small venue. When Dylan stopped playing, he exited by walking down the aisle that passed by my seat. When he reached me, much to my surprise, he paused and said, "Are you Rebecca Adams?" When I responded in the affirmative, Dylan said, "I have a message for you from Jerry. He says, 'finish your damn book.'"

Jerry is not the only one who is anxious for me to finish my book on Deadheads, the fans of the former rock band, the Grateful Dead. Since 1989, when I took my theory and methods students on the Grateful Dead's Summer tour, I have heard from Deadheads on a daily basis. At least once a week, and sometimes as frequently as once or more a day, an interested Deadhead inquires about my progress. Their voices are added to those of my academic colleagues, many of whom worry that I will never submit my manuscript to a publisher.

During a conversation with my department head, David Pratto, he commented that I should finish the book so that I could get "something out of all of the hard work" I have done on the project. I left his office with mixed emotions and thoughts. On the one hand, I agreed with Pratto entirely. On the other hand, I thought I had accomplished a great deal as part of the project already and felt I had gotten a lot out of it. Of course, Pratto was talking about professional credit, not about impact on others or professional development. As much as I appreciated Pratto's counsel and his support for a project many department heads would have discouraged, I was irritated that our profession values publication almost to the exclusion of everything else that we do as sociologists. Our disciplinary norms, and those of the academy in general, encourage an emphasis on productivity over an emphasis on process.

### *Emphasis on Process as Well as on Productivity*

When I was in graduate school at the University of Chicago, I worked for James Davis. I found out that he had received a B.A. in Journalism from Northwestern before he decided to become a sociologist. I asked him why he had changed careers. He said that a journalist had to come up with a new idea almost every day and that, in contrast, a sociologist only needed a new idea once every decade.

Expectations regarding rate of productivity have increased since Davis graduated from college. At least in this regard, sociology is becoming more like journalism. Because current academic norms encourage an emphasis on productivity rather than on process, researchers are encouraged to rush through the data collection phase of projects and to publish as much as possible as soon as possible.

I often hear colleagues, sounding like journalists, talking about "deadlines" they have to meet rather than about the theoretical ideas that are motivating their research. Think back to the 1920s and 1930s when the Lynds (1929,1937) were researching Middletown and Stolz and Jones were establishing the Oakland Growth Study (Elder 1972). Was the primary concern of these researchers rate of publication? I doubt it. Did they plan in advance exactly how long they would be collecting data? I doubt this as well. It has not always been the way it is today and it does not have to stay this way. Yes, I am calling for a slowdown. We need to pay more attention to the process of being sociologists and less attention to our rates of productivity. We need to shift our priorities.

As my personal contribution to furthering this cause, following Davis's advice, I have been collecting data on Deadheads for about a decade. I must admit that I did not intentionally set out to challenge the current norm regarding rapid project-turnaround by undertaking this research. Another norm influenced me to move forward slowly and carefully -- the one prescribing that we study "deserving populations"

### DEADHEADS AS AN UNDESERVING POPULATION

Neither the general public nor all sociologists perceive Deadheads to be a "deserving population." The general public perceives Deadheads to be undeserving not only because of their musical taste, but also because of their acceptance of psychedelic drug use and the way they dress. On the other hand, some sociologists view Deadheads as unworthy because they are not obviously victims of the social structure, oppressors, or change agents. On the surface, at least, Deadheads appear to be frivolous, spending time partying rather than working for social justice. Although my research has revealed a much more complex phenomenon, their public image prevails.

Despite the collective departmental risk involved, my University of North Carolina at Greensboro colleagues have been very supportive of this project since its inception. Some of them did not stop with supportive comments, but actually attended Grateful Dead shows with me or with others during the course of this research project. Given this supportive environment, I was inclined to listen carefully when senior colleagues advised caution. Joseph Himes warned me that whatever I wrote about Deadheads would be closely scrutinized, because they were "not very nice people." James "Skip" Skipper, who was then my department head, warned me that anything I wrote about Deadheads would be subtracted from my professional accomplishments rather than added to them. Those of you who remember "Skipper's Strippers" (e.g., Skipper & McCaghy 1970, 1971) know that he was not making a veiled threat but was speaking from painful personal experience. So I decided to focus the majority of my energy on the gerontological part of my friendship research agenda and to work on the Deadhead project only when I had spare time.

### NEGATIVE SANCTIONS

This was not merely a paranoid reaction. By the time I reached this decision, I had been negatively sanctioned repeatedly. I was worried that public reaction would not only adversely affect me, but also my department, the discipline, and in my darkest and most grandiose moments, higher education as a whole.

Shortly after the university announced my intention to teach field research methods and applied social theory to students and then take them on the Grateful Dead's summer tour to collect data, the Greensboro News and Record ran an editorial making disparaging comments about the class, the university, sociology, and higher

education (DuBuisson 1989). When I called the deputy editorial page editor to complain about his failure to do any background research, he invited me to write an op ed piece for a subsequent issue (Adams 1989b). Although my editorial was well received, the damage had been done.

While I was advertising the Deadhead class on a local radio station at the request of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Office of Information Services, the disk jockey referred to detractors of the idea of the class as "old farts" (Rock 92, 1989). I quickly expressed my dislike of the term, reminding him that I was, after all, a gerontologist. Fortunately one of my students had recorded the interview, so the next day it was possible to calm down the senior faculty in my department. They had heard that I had called administrators "old farts" I would have never done this, not only because I refrain from the use of ageist terms as a matter of principle, but also because the administration at UNCG was supportive of the idea of the Deadhead class.

The next assault came from an irate alumna. She wrote to our chancellor indicating her intention to withhold future support from the University. She was mainly upset by my Deadhead sociology classes, but, thankfully, she also complained about his support of competitive athletics. He defended me, accurately telling her that I was "seeking to accomplish an old aim in a new way" (Moran 1989).

Then Senator Robert Byrd, who was Chair of Senate Appropriations, was quoted in the Chronicle of Higher Education (1991) as criticizing "several 'questionable, even fatuous, nonsense courses' at universities including a... sociology course offered... at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, which studied the followers of the rock group the Grateful Dead." He entered similar comments into The Congressional Record (Senate 1991). Although he said his feelings would not affect his support for Pell Grants and other federal higher-education programs, the threat was blatant. In response to the article in The Chronicle of Higher Education, the American Sociological Association staff contacted his office on my behalf, on behalf of the discipline, and on behalf of higher education. Once again, I responded, this time by writing a letter to the editor of The Chronicle of Higher Education in which I discussed the pedagogical strengths of the course (Adams 1991a). Once again the damage had already been done.

Excerpts from The Chronicle article were reprinted in Fortune Magazine (1991), where J.D. Spangler, then President of the University of North Carolina system, read them. He contacted our chancellor and asked him for information regarding the course. Once I had responded, apparently satisfactorily, I heard nothing else about the President's concern.

Nonetheless, enough was enough. I was afraid to give my Deadhead project my full attention. I put it on the back burner and let it simmer. Every once in a while, I would turn the heat up, and then I would turn it down again.

Ironically, prolonging the data collection phase of this project has had positive latent effects. The most obvious result, perhaps, is that I have outlasted the Grateful Dead. This has provided me with a natural experimental opportunity to study the consequential transformation of the Deadhead community. Of more general interest, however, is how moving slowly has given me the opportunity to emphasize process over productivity and to engage publics in sociological dialogue.

### *Overview*

In the rest of this article, I discuss the impact this project has had on others, how it has contributed to my own professional development, and how it has contributed to the quality of the data I have collected. In so doing, I discuss the ways in which I engaged students, the media, and Deadheads in sociological dialogue. This case study of my experiences informs my concluding critique of a system that rewards productivity almost to the exclusion of rewarding process.

Let me be clear from the outset. I do not think of the Deadhead project as unique. To one degree or another, most projects are multifaceted and result in more than articles and research monographs. As you read this article, I would encourage you to think about a project in which you are engaged. Think about the many aspects

of the project, what you have learned from being involved, and how your involvement has affected others. I would also encourage you to think, however, about how the norms impinging on the members of our profession have dictated how you have proceeded and about what you might have accomplished additionally if you had followed your instincts. Think about the aspects of the project that were professionally rewarding to you, but were not professionally rewarded.

### *Engaging Students in Sociological Dialogue*

In the spring of 1986, my husband's boss invited us to attend a Grateful Dead concert with him in Hampton, Virginia. My presence at the concert did not go unnoticed by the students from my university. Others who had gone to the concert dropped by my office to share their experiences.

One of my department's best majors, now a successful entrepreneur, put considerable pressure on me to study the subculture. I told him studying Deadheads did not fit into my research agenda. As a throwback to the old Chicago school, I agree with Abbott (1997) and Hallinan (1998) that social facts must be examined within their temporal, spatial, cultural, and structural contexts. Furthermore, we should select the contexts we study for theoretical reasons. I was intending to study academics who attended professional conferences, because I was interested in studying people who formed friendships but did not live near each other. The student convinced me that concerts were as good a setting as conferences for the topic I wanted to study. Both contexts were intermittently territorial communities. The Deadhead community met my theoretical requirements and had additional advantages. I would have the fresh perspective of a newcomer, and the research was likely to excite my students more than a study of academics would have. Thus began my study of the ways in which the cultural conventions and structural conditions of the Deadhead community affect friendship structure and process and of how the community was formed and maintained despite the absence of permanent shared territory (see Adams & Allan 1998 and Adams & Blieszner 1994 for discussions of theoretical issues relevant to this research).

### INDEPENDENT STUDIES

I decided to have a meeting of students who had been in Virginia for the Dead shows. Two of them offered to help me study the Deadhead community in exchange for learning research methods and independent study course credit. I agreed. Four students ended up helping me develop a questionnaire in the spring of 1987. They distributed it during that summer while they were "on tour." The following fall, after having collected almost 300 questionnaires, the students continued to meet with me, learning data entry and simple data analysis techniques.

Although the major insight we gained from the survey results was that field research was warranted, this was an extremely good teaching experience for me. The students developed active sociological imaginations and worked harder than is typical. The experience I had with these independent study students convinced me of the importance of research-based teaching (Clark 1997).

### DEADHEAD SOCIOLOGY CLASSES

It was out of these independent studies that the idea for the Deadhead sociology classes was born. This idea was not mine. By the time I heard about it, James Skipper, who was then my department head, had already convinced John Young, who was then the Director of the Office of Continuing Education and Summer Sessions, to ask me to offer a course focused on Deadhead subculture. I decided to offer two: Field Research and Applied Social Theory (see Adams 1991b and Howery 1989 for discussions of these classes). Teaching these courses provided me with the opportunity for full immersion in teaching, an excuse to reread the work of my favorite social theorist, Georg Simmel, and entry into the subculture I wanted to study using field research methods.

Based on my experience overseeing the independent studies, I thought of this class as a way to recruit intelligent students who might not otherwise be motivated to take sociology courses. I was not disappointed. The first day I came home from class in a panic. The students had raised ethical issues and asked sophisticated

theoretical and methodological questions. My previous teaching experience had not prepared me for an entire class room filled with students like these. I began to climb a steep learning curve.

The goal of the courses was to integrate theory and research, so all of the students took both of them. I set out to teach the students the relevance of classical theory and research methods for understanding their everyday lives. They read literature on theory, research methods, and Deadhead history. They did practice interviews and observations. Guest lecturers included a political sociologist, a mystic, an economist, an expert on rock and roll, and a lawyer.

After 60 hours of classroom instruction, the class boarded a bus and attended eight concerts all over the Northeastern quarter of the United States. The students each did four hours of observation at each concert and four open-ended interviews during the tour. We met with Michael Kaern (1983,1990), an expert on Simmel, and Dennis McNally (1979), who is a historian and was also the Dead's publicist. The students rotated responsibility for recording sayings on bumper stickers and the states of license plates, collecting newspaper articles, and interviewing stadium staff. We had class meetings in hotel rooms, in restaurants, and on the bus. Many of the students did several drafts of their papers, some of them rewriting them even after I had handed in final grades for the course.

The hard work of the students paid off for them. One paper was presented at the annual meetings of the American Folklore Society (Freeman 1990). Another paper received an honorable mention in the North Carolina Sociological Associations Joseph Himes Undergraduate Paper competition (Durham 1989). Yet another, written by my two graduate assistants, was published (Epstein & Sardiello 1990).

Papers were not the only consequence of the course. The students were research assistants on a documentary shown on Public Broadcasting Stations (Edwards & Adams 1989). A local artist who took the class claimed her painting style changed as a result; a painting she did upon returning from being on tour was selected to be hung in the North Carolina Museum of Art as part of the North Carolina Artists Exhibition (Henry 1989). Two students transferred to my university to be with their new friends. Three students enrolled as regular students who had previously dropped out. Since the class, my former students have continued to apply the knowledge they gained. Several of them have used their Simmelian lenses to study other content.

The students were not the only ones who benefitted from my close relationships with them. My teaching style was permanently changed. Before teaching these courses, my contact with students outside of class was mainly limited to discussions during my office hours with the talented and the troubled. On the road, I was always available to all of my students. I learned that not all students are at their best during normal classroom hours. Some students are brilliant at odd times of the day or night. I remember at the time thinking that there was nothing I could do about acting on this insight when I returned to Greensboro; I would be back to teaching on a normal schedule. Since that time, however, this experience has led me to be an advocate of Internet courses and other types of asynchronous learning experiences.

Through direct observations of their efforts, I also learned the importance of encouraging students to use the methodological skills that fit best with their personality. Shy students need not do interviewing. Gregarious students need not try to be passive observers. Some people can only learn by participating. I now encourage my research methods students to develop their own style rather than to mimic one recommended by me or by a textbook author.

Usually it is possible for sociology faculty to conduct research without the help of students. This project was an exception. Once we were on the road, I realized that I needed my students to introduce me to the subculture and to act as my initial family within it. They became my informants, or guides, as I have since decided to call them, and my collaborators. When I look back at the research notes they took as part of the class, I regret not giving them higher grades. I simply did not know enough to appreciate their observations fully in the way that I do now. These students, most of whom are now graduate students or professionals in their chosen fields, have continued to guide me in my research. Almost without exception, they still occasionally call me, e-mail me, or

visit me. When they do, they provide me with information about Deadhead community events, and we discuss theoretical interpretations of recent developments. Who could ask for better guides? After all, we learned to view the subculture through Simmelian lenses together.

### INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER STUDENTS

The students who took the class are not the only students who have helped me with the Deadhead project since its inception. Master's students, graduate assistants, undergraduate assistants, and independent study students have been involved. Most surprising were the volunteers who were not enrolled at my university. For example, Matt Esposito, then a high school student from Yorktown Heights, New York, spent a semester doing an internship with me. Mark Hauber, then a graduate of Fairleigh Dickinson who has since completed two Master's of Education degrees at Boston College, relocated to Greensboro for several years to help me with the project. Mike Tobkes, a graduate of Guilford College, spent a summer distributing questionnaires and making critical comments on drafts of chapters of my book. During the last decade, more than 165 students from other institutions, including a few high schools, have contacted me regarding term papers, theses, and dissertations. Often I have learned as much from them as they have learned from me.

### EDITED BOOK OF STUDENT PAPERS

These experiences convinced me of the importance of encouraging students to study topics of interest to them. I am currently co-editing a book, *Social Scientists on Tour: You Ain't Gonna Learn What You Don't Want to Know* (see Barlow & Weir 1972 for the source of the subtitle) which celebrates this pedagogical philosophy. My co-editor, Robert Sardiello, was one of my assistants during the Deadhead class and subsequently researched Dead shows as ritual experiences for his master's thesis (Sardiello 1994).

Each chapter of *Social Scientists on Tour* was drafted by at least one person who was a student during the time the reported research was conducted. Only a couple of the authors were strangers when I asked them to contribute. Some of them were students at other institutions who contacted me because they knew about my work. I met others, such as George Ritzer's son Jeremy (Ritzer 1990, 1992), at shows while we were both collecting data. I contacted one contributor, Alan Lehman, when a newspaper reporter told me about his dissertation (Lehman 1994). Some of the contributors are former students who worked with me directly. For example, Brent Paterline, now a faculty member at North Georgia College and State University, is contributing a chapter based on the master's thesis he did with me (Paterline 1993). Stephanie Jennings (1996), who is now enrolled in our master's program at UNCG, is contributing a chapter based on a paper she wrote as my undergraduate assistant. One of the students who took the Deadhead class, Robert Freeman (1995), is now a clerk in the NBC Law Department. Before completing his law degree at New York University, he received an MA in Folklore from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I served on his committee, because he studied the fans of a local psychedelic band using the symbolic interactionist perspective he had first learned in my class. He is contributing a paper based on that research.

For many of these former students, their book chapters will be their first publications. For Sardiello, it is his first edited book. For me, it is a work of love, of the former students who are contributing, of teaching, and of the subculture we all have studied.

### *Engaging the Media in Sociological Dialogue*

Before the class started, the Grateful Dead came to Greensboro as part of their 1989 Spring tour. I began my field research project by standing in line at TicketMaster and at the Greensboro Coliseum, by spending time in the parking lot before the shows, and by attending all of the shows in the run. I also interviewed police officers who were on duty at the concerts, people cleaning up the parking lot the morning after the run was over, and staff members at nearby hotels and restaurants. The comments I collected were overwhelmingly positive. Our local paper ran an article that quoted only negative statements (Alexander 1989). When I wrote a letter acknowledging the negative aspects of the experience, but also describing the positive ones, the editor published my letter, leaving out my acknowledgment of the negative aspects (Adams 1989a). This made my account of the visit appear to have been as biased toward the positive as theirs had been biased toward the negative.

I should have known this would happen. I was familiar with Howard Becker's (1967) article, "Whose Side Are We On?" in which he argued that sociologists are more likely to be accused of bias when we challenge the hierarchy of credibility by 'describing reality from the perspective of the underdog. (Coincidentally, Becker and Skipper had accompanied me to one of the Greensboro shows I had described in my letter to the editor. Becker's insights should have been foremost in my mind.) This experience with the press, and the subsequent negative editorial I have already discussed, convinced me that I needed to learn how to deal with the media. I began to climb another steep learning curve.

### MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE CLASS

Before the class and I left for tour, I had been contacted by all three major television networks and numerous newspaper reporters and radio show hosts. Needless to say, I was a bit nervous about agreeing to be interviewed after the experience I had already had with the media. Joanne Creighton, who was then the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, called a meeting to discuss media strategy. The consensus was that no media representatives would be allowed to travel with us. I was to grant interviews when people requested them, because the courses were rigorous academically and telling this to reporters was deemed better than letting them speculate. I was the only one who was to talk to media representatives until after we returned, because we wanted the anonymity of the student researchers to be preserved as they mingled with Deadheads.

The coverage the class received as we traveled around the country was quite positive, as the band's publicist, Dennis McNally, had predicted it would be. Reporters described the class as an educational innovation and expressed surprise that it was being taught at a university in a state as conservative as North Carolina was perceived to be. This angle was intriguing enough that reporters did not need to denigrate the subculture or the class to capture the attention of their readers.

### MEDIA COVERAGE AFTER THE CLASS RETURNED FROM TOUR

A week before the class started, a feature writer for the Charlotte Observer had written an article saying that Jerry had agreed to read the best student papers (Kelley 1989). (This might have contributed to the students' persistence in rewriting their papers). Upon our return from being on tour, another Charlotte Observer reporter included this information in a story that went out on the wire services (Haight 1989). Until it became obvious that Jerry was not going to read the papers after all, I was hounded by media representatives.

Although I have not since received quite as many calls in such a short period of time as I did immediately after the class, reporters have continued to call me periodically. Every time the Dead went on tour, I received a few phone calls. When Jerry died, I received another rash of them. Since Jerry's death, most of the reporters have wanted to ask questions about the economic aspects of the phenomenon and how the Deadhead community has been evolving.

Since I taught the class, I have given interviews to representatives of a variety of media, including 33 radio stations and networks, 13 television stations and networks, 77 newspapers, 15 magazines, and two independent film companies. Included among the reporters who have interviewed me are representatives of the Chicago Tribune, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Newsday, Philadelphia Inquirer, USA Today, Detroit Free Press, and London's Mail on Sunday. I did radio interviews with NPR, NRS of the Canadian Broadcasting System, BBC, and many other stations and networks. I appeared on ABC News, MTV, HBO, Entertainment Tonight, and local television stations all over the country.

### HANDLING THE MEDIA

When my more than 15 minutes of fame (Warhol et al. 1968, n.p.) began, social scientists had written very little about how to deal with the media. Although the problem facing the discipline in general is the lack of public interest in sociology and reporters' lack of interest in talking to us (Boyle 1997; Luebke 1996), this was not my problem. As Allan Johnson (1997) wrote in Footnotes, my problem was that most people do not think sociologically. I had to figure out how "to articulate a systematic way of thinking, a framework of core concepts and ideas that is powerful, simple, and coherent." In my case, these concepts and ideas had to do with

contextual effects on friendship and the formation of an intermittently territorial community. As Felice Levine (1996) has advised, I needed to find ways to educate reporters about how to view the world through sociological lenses.

Although I gradually learned through experience, I was also fortunate to have two well-qualified mentors. Emily Edwards, a colleague on the faculty of UNCG's Department of Broadcasting/Cinema and Theater, was a broadcast journalist before receiving her doctorate. She attended classes with the students in order to find out which sociological concepts and theories would inform the research so she could develop a list of images to capture while she traveled with the class on tour. Her documentary (Edwards & Adams 1989), which was shown nationally on PBS in 1990 and again in 1995, resulted from our collaboration. My voice served as the sound bed for Edwards' images. In the process of working on the documentary together, she coached me on how to engage a lay audience in sociological dialogue.

I also learned a great deal from Dennis McNally who had years of experience dealing with the press as the Dead's publicist and holds a doctoral degree in American History from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. These twin credentials made him sensitive to my need to maintain rapport with Deadheads at the same time I was advancing scientific understanding of the phenomenon.

Although advice about how to communicate particular findings and theoretical perspectives is difficult to give in the abstract, some of what I learned from Edwards and McNally is generally applicable. The most important and basic advice they gave me was to answer questions briefly, concisely, and without using jargon (see also Boyle 1997 and Luebke 1996). This discourages reporters from interpreting long or complex answers incorrectly and from choosing an unimportant point to quote.

Edwards taught me that being interviewed for radio or television was different from being interviewed for the print media, because audience members are more likely than readers to accept the way in which those interviewed are presented as accurate. To prepare for a television or radio interview, it is important to anticipate the questions that might be asked and to prepare concise answers in advance. When an unanticipated question is asked, Edwards recommends rephrasing the question aloud to be sure you understand it and then thinking as long as necessary before responding. In a recorded situation, if this fails and you find yourself in the midst of saying something you would rather not say, Edwards says that "coughing or sneezing uncontrollably" might work. I have found this technique to be very effective. In a live interview, however, she cautions that this might be perceived as a ruse.

In both the print and recorded media, reporters sometimes quote people out of context. Editors can easily place an answer to one question after an entirely different question. Edwards taught me to embed the questions themselves in answers, so this is not as easy for an editor to do. This technique will help to avoid the shocking experience of hearing your own voice answering a question that was never posed to you.

McNally taught me ways to shape the reporter's story. "You don't have to answer the question they ask you" he coached me. "Answer a related one that you want to answer." So, for example, when reporters asked me what motivated Deadheads to attend so many shows or to follow the band from place to place, I discussed the structural and cultural foundations of the community and provided them with the name of a psychologist who could talk about motivation more sensibly than I could.

Later, with McNally's help, I figured out that I did not have to agree to be interviewed at all. I generally begin an interview by asking the reporter about what story he or she wants to write. I also ask questions to determine the reporter's preconceived attitudes toward Deadheads and how open he or she is to changing them. Then I decide whether I have anything to contribute and whether I want to contribute it. If the reporter is reluctant to tell me what he or she is going to write, I try to figure out why. If the reporter does not have an idea, I suggest one. If he or she appears to have a hidden agenda, I decline to be interviewed. I have made some errors in judgment, but this usually works.

## BENEFITS OF COOPERATION WITH REPORTERS

Learning to engage the media in sociological dialogue was worth it. My research was enriched by my cooperation with reporters. Sometimes the benefit was direct. Reporters, recognizing that our goals were different and that we were not in competition, often shared information with me. Together we developed new insights.

Other times the benefits were indirect. Deadheads who saw or heard my name in the media contacted me with offers to help me with my research. It is surprising how much these volunteer research assistants have contributed to this project. In addition to the help from students I have already described, Deadheads sent me newspaper and magazine dippings, provided me with places to stay during the data collection phase of my project, introduced me to people who knew things I needed to know, filled out or distributed questionnaires, or merely shared their accounts of the subculture with me. The more media coverage I received, the more volunteers stepped forward and the more trust Deadheads had in me.

### *Engaging Deadheads in Sociological Dialogue*

Not only did many Deadheads find out about my project through the mainstream press, I also communicated specifically and sometimes directly with Deadheads. I have spoken with many of them in face-to-face encounters, while observing shows, when I was presenting my research findings, and in other contexts. I have engaged them in dialogue through Deadhead media such as The Golden Road and Dupree's Diamond News magazines, Dead Head TV, and the Unbroken Chain newsletter. I helped David Gans, the host of The Grateful Dead Radio Hour, conduct interviews with Deadheads in the parking lots of several West Coast shows. I exchanged messages with Deadheads by telephone, by letter, and by e-mail. I have a whole file drawer of letters from Deadheads, and my hard drive houses more than 21 megabytes of communications from them, including transcriptions of face-to-face interviews, e-mail messages, and responses to open-ended questionnaires. I have responded personally to the vast majority of these communications.

## MAINTAINING DISTANCE

In the beginning of the Deadhead research project, I tried not to influence the community I was studying. I had been socialized as a graduate student during a time when "getting involved" meant the same thing as "going native" "going native" meant the same thing as "losing objectivity," and "losing objectivity" meant that it would be impossible to make a contribution to the scientific understanding of a phenomenon. I was therefore careful to discuss both my sociological observations of the Deadhead community and my emotional reactions to Deadhead community events with only a small number of close friends, colleagues, and guides. Although as early as the summer of 1989 I had started consistently reading and downloading conversations posted on a Deadhead computer bulletin board, I posted very infrequently and then only to request information related to my research or to arrange for tickets to shows. When I spoke to reporters, I fed them neutral bits of information, holding back anything that would have influenced Deadhead community events or revealed my own growing attachment to the phenomenon.

## GETTING INVOLVED

I reached a turning point in 1991. The Greensboro City Council had a problem. The Dead and Deadheads were coming to town again. The Greensboro Coliseum desperately needed the Dead, because the Dead were sure to sell out and the Coliseum needed the money. Still remembering the bad newspaper coverage Deadheads had been given in the spring of 1989, the members of the Greensboro City Council were concerned about the negative impact Deadheads would have on the community surrounding the coliseum.

Greensboro Mayor Carolyn Allen, who taught in our department for years before becoming a politician, suggested that I be called in as a consultant. After I did a workshop for the Coliseum staff, David Williams, then an assistant chief of police, asked me to do a presentation for his officers as well. I provided the Coliseum staff and the Greensboro Police Department with four pages of suggestions, the most important of which was to discourage the press from covering the event. Among other recommendations, the list also included suggestions for a ban on neighbors charging Deadheads to camp in their lawns, to provide shuttle buses from nearby hotels,

to place plenty of port-a-johns around the parking lot, to book Deadheads in hotel rooms away from those occupied by other visitors to Greensboro, and to provide trash bags to fans. Deadheads volunteered to help. Unbroken Chain, a Deadhead publication, did a story about the success of the intervention that subsequently took place (West 1991). I had become a Deadhead community resource.

It became apparent to me that I was influencing the phenomenon I was studying. Parents of Deadheads telephoned me to ask for help in understanding their Deadhead children. Lawyers contacted me for information useful in preparing their Deadhead clients' cases. Students contacted me for assistance with research papers, often seeking legitimation and support rather than information. After Jerry died, even some children of Deadheads contacted me seeking an understanding of their parents' grief experiences. David Gans, not only the host of the Grateful Dead Radio Hour, but also a prolific writer, began using my sociological terminology. The words "experientialism" "subculture" "structure" and "cohort" began creeping into Deadhead vocabulary. In 1995, right before Jerry died, I contributed drafts of definitions of several Deadhead terms and a discussion of the Deadhead sociology classes to *Skeleton Key: A Dictionary for Deadheads* (Shenk & Silberman 1995). (I was also incidentally quoted discussing my daughter's first visit to a Dead show under the entry for "Deadhead-in-Utero.")

McNally, the Dead's publicist, had initially warned me that I would become a "lightning rod" for people's interest in the subculture. I suspect even he was surprised at how accurate his prediction proved to be.

Although I had already realized that I was having an influence on the community and had decided this was an inevitable byproduct of participant observation, I continued to stop short of publishing any analyses of the phenomenon. Not only was I fearful of being negatively sanctioned for studying an undeserving population, I was afraid that Deadheads would begin shaping the information they gave to me to fit my theoretical framework. I had presented papers on the topic at a number of professional meetings, but I did not distribute drafts when they were requested. Only a carefully selected group of Deadheads and sociologists had commented on drafts of chapters of my book.

#### WRITING FOR A DEADHEAD AUDIENCE

My relative silence ended the day Jerry died. In the midst of my grief and confusion over what I was to do next both personally and professionally, I realized that Deadheads needed my help. They were grieving in a variety of ways, and the variety of their responses to Jerry's death was causing conflict within the community. Some Deadheads equated his death with the end of the phenomenon he had helped create, and others did not. As someone who was familiar with the literature on mourning, I felt responsible for analyzing what was happening and for sharing that analysis as my way of helping the community to begin healing.

In the aftermath of Jerry's death, I wrote three papers for Deadhead publications. In the first paper, I discussed the parallels between Jerry's world view and the theoretical perspective of Georg Simmel (Adams 1995a). By casting Jerry as a Simmelian symbolic interactionist, who would certainly use more than one social form as visors for viewing the content of his death, I was able to suggest how he might have discussed the effects of his own demise:

Jerry would remind us... that everyone sees things differently... Maybe he was the Grateful Dead; maybe he was not. Bickering over the future is not productive. Helping to invent it is. Jerry would remind us that no one person constructs reality for us. Just because he is gone does not mean the creative process has come to an end. (Adams 1995a:18)

The second article was, to my thrill as a child of the sixties, sandwiched between articles by Ken Babbs (1989) and Ken Kesey (1962,1964). In it, I described the process of anticipatory grief that had plagued the community for years, the closeness Deadheads felt to Jerry, and the variety of responses to Jerry's death (Adams 1995b). Although I did not use sociological jargon in the paper, the heart of it was a description of an interaction effect between stage of life course, stage of Deadhead career, and type of reaction.

I was invited to do a follow-up article by the same magazine, because like me, the editors were swamped with pleas for help from desperately depressed Deadheads (Adams 1996). I interviewed two therapists, Gary Greenberg and Jane RosenGrandon, and cited their advice in the article. Using Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages of Death and Dying as a framework in which to analyze the grief process, I included quotations from Deadhead letters to illustrate the stages of mourning. Although I included a caveat critiquing stage theories, I reassured Deadheads that their perspectives on Jerry's death would probably change over time and reminded them of the strength of the community available to support them.

## BENEFITS OF WRITING FOR DEADHEADS

Normally when we publish scholarly articles, it is like throwing them into a black hole. Evidence that people are reading them is sparse. Occasional requests for reprints, citations, and comments by colleagues are the only indication that we receive that anyone has paid attention to them. Writing for Deadhead publications was an entirely different experience. Hundreds of Deadheads corresponded with me about what I had written.

Although some of the comments were constructively critical, most of them were overwhelmingly positive. Many of those who contacted me explicitly thanked me for my "offering to Garcia as well as the mourners." For example, one Deadhead wrote:

Your insights on the social and spiritual aspects of being part of the Grateful Dead experience should be spread as far afield as possible, whether in writing or by word of mouth....

He went on to say:

Academics have a history of distancing themselves from actual active participation in the object of their studies, something about the observer/participant dichotomy. It is my fervent hope that you have also studied quantum mechanics and know that we can no longer pretend to be just observers. Thank you for letting me share this with 'you and thank you for helping me once again reckon with my grief. If I may be of any service to you, please contact me. I firmly believe that the basis for the success of these articles was that I had, as Blalock (1970) encouraged us to do years ago, used existing theory to help suggest possible solutions to a current problem.

Some of the respondents began intellectual discussions with me. I heard from religious studies scholars, a psychiatrist, an English professor, an architect, philosophers, and many others. A master's student in literature asked if Simmel had any connection with Claude Levi-Strauss. He engaged me in a discussion of the relationship of semiotics and symbolic interactionism. A sociology undergraduate corresponded with me comparing the utility of a Weberian and Simmelian approach to the study of Deadheads. A philosopher wrote to me about the parallels between the historical evolution of the Deadhead phenomenon and the development of Taoism. Another philosopher questioned whether Simmel's metaphysical view was relativistic realism or what he called "outright irrealism" Like many of the others who contacted me, he provided me with a lengthy reading list.

Writing the articles also affected my ability to collect data. At the end of each of the three articles, I announced the availability of a questionnaire on the topic of Deadhead friendship patterns and requested that Deadheads write to me regarding their mourning process and ways of staying connected to the experience After Jerry's Death (AJD). Of the 150 Deadheads who eventually responded to this request, 49% mentioned that they had read at least one of my three articles in Deadhead publications. About 11% expressed some prior familiarity with my research project by mentioning the class, the documentary, my contributions to Skeleton Key, my book-in-progress, or a presentation I was scheduled to do at an upcoming Deadhead retreat. In addition, 31% requested copies of the friendship questionnaire. I also received numerous requests for the questionnaire from people who had read one or more of these articles but had not written to me about their experiences AID.

The Deadhead community is very large and complex. It consists of a mosaic of overlapping subgroups, some of which are more elusive than others. In the case of some groups, merely studying the subculture long enough that

I had time to establish contact with representatives was adequate. In other cases, I had to prove myself as trustworthy and knowledgeable before group representatives would step forward to help me. Two groups that were particularly difficult for me to approach were drug dealers and members of a Deadhead cult known variously as the Church of Unlimited Devotion, the Family, or simply the Spinners. It was particularly important that I gain the trust of these two groups, because they tended to be the most orthodox of Deadheads.

Drug dealers often called themselves "agents of enlightenment" and they considered the service they provided to be central to the spiritual goals of the community. During most of my field research, the federal government was engaged in what Deadheads called "The War on Some Drugs." I decided early in the research process not to attempt to interview drug dealers about their trade for fear of being suspected of being a law enforcement agent. I cannot imagine anything else that would have threatened my ability to collect data any more than such suspicion would have. Because large numbers of Deadheads were arrested at most shows, drug dealers tended to become prisoners. Although I had received some correspondence from Deadhead prisoners before I wrote these three articles, I did not receive detailed accounts of the events that had led to their arrests until afterwards.

I first became aware of the Family, whose members spun like whirling dervishes in attempts to connect with a higher power, during the summer I taught the class. An undergraduate anthropology student from Princeton, Jennifer Hartley, was traveling with these spinners, collecting data for her senior thesis (Hartley 1990a). My intention was to cite her work rather than to intrude on her research turf. Before I had learned how to handle interviews with media representatives effectively, however, I mentioned her research to a Deadhead reporter. I thought he would interview her, because she was an expert on the subgroup and I was not. Instead he quoted me ("Deadhead 101" 1989). Because my knowledge of the spinners was incomplete and thus inaccurate, Hartley and the group she was studying were quite upset with me. Hartley and I both wrote letters to the editor. He printed her complaint (Hartley 1990b), but did not print my apology. For years I could obtain no information about the cult. I lost a considerable amount of sleep guiltily lamenting the mistake I had made.

A few months before Jerry died, one of my guides put me in touch with an Orthodox Jewish spinner -- a heterodox, as he described himself. Although he and I corresponded some by e-mail and he was willing to meet with me, he expressed reluctance to discuss the Family. Our plans to meet at a show were foiled by Jerry's untimely death. I thought I would never gain this spinner's trust. Then after I wrote the second of the two articles for Deadhead publications, I received an e-mail message from him. He explained that he had seen the article that had been published in 1989 ("Deadhead 101" 1989), and it had made him reluctant to talk to me. He went on to say:

I must say, however, that your article in the year end edition [of Dupree's Diamond News] told me that something had happened that brought you to another place entirely. I couldn't sleep last night, it so jarred me out of five months of numbness/ hibernation/denial... So, I understand you have a list of questions... (I've already been thinking of some for you, too).

This guide has become one of my most valuable. He has commented on drafts of chapters, challenging my interpretations of data and steadfastly reminding me that Deadheads are not all as affluent as the majority of them are.

Subsequent to establishing this exchange, one of the editors of Dupree's Diamond News, John Dwork, arranged for Jennifer Hartley and me to meet. In June of 1996 when the remainders of the Grateful Dead played with the San Francisco Symphony during a three-night run, I had dinner with a group that included Hartley and Caroline Rago, who had been an important member of the Church of Unlimited Devotion before its dissolution. At a subsequent Deadhead gathering, the two of them had time to get to know me better. Hartley, who is now a doctoral student at Brown University, and Rago, who is finishing up a social work degree at Smith College, are writing a book about the Family and the Church, *Knockin' on Heaven's Door: The Story of the Grateful Dead Spinners*. They have been generous with time and information in helping me write about spinners in my own book. Hartley is contributing a chapter based on her senior thesis to *Social Scientists on Tour*. She has asked me

to serve as an outside reader on her dissertation committee. (For her dissertation, she is researching gender roles among the fans of another psychedelic band, Phish.) Other spinners, in addition to the heterodox, Hartley, and Rago, have provided me with information for my book as well.

If I had not written articles for Deadhead publications, I might not ever have developed rapport with prisoners or spinners. My research would have been less complete as a result.

### MARGARET MEAD OF TIE-DYE

After writing for Deadhead publications, my relationship with the subculture was altered. I was indeed a Deadhead tribal sociologist or, as John Barlow, one of the Dead's lyricists had dubbed me, the Margaret Mead of Tie-Dye. (You may recognize Barlow's name as one of the founders of the Electronic Frontier Foundation). I was invited to participate on a panel with some of the elders of the Deadhead community. I presented my analysis of how the community had been formed and maintained while the members of the band were playing together as the Grateful Dead. Discussion focused on what part of the community structure was still in place and what had been lost. This panel was part of a Deadhead retreat, called Light the Song, which was attended mainly by middle-aged professionals with long-term commitments to the community. When Dupree's Diamond News later had some financial trouble, I was asked to help with an advertising campaign to increase subscriptions. I provided a quotation about the sociological importance of media in community maintenance. Later, I contributed abstracts of scholarly work on Deadheads to *The Grateful Dead* and *the Deadheads: An Annotated Bibliography* (Dodd & Weiner 1997). I knew I would be listed in the author index. I was a bit astonished to find my name in the subject index.

So, I had climbed another steep learning curve. I had realized the benefit of sharing my insights with members of the community I was studying as I was formulating them. I had learned how to write so that nonsociologists could understand what I was saying. I had introduced some Deadheads to the sociology of Georg Simmel. I had learned firsthand that research subjects were more forthcoming when trust and reciprocal exchange were involved.

### *Conclusions*

So, although I began the Deadhead project intending to publish after a brief period of data collection, I have continued seeking an understanding of the phenomenon for a decade. During this process, I have had ample time to engage students, the media, and the members of the community I am studying in sociological dialogue. As a result, I have become a better teacher and more skilled at communicating sociological ideas to the media. I have also had the opportunity to incite sociological thoughts among a variety of people. This has been an extremely valuable process to me and I think also to the students I have had the privilege of teaching and to the Deadhead community. My book, tentatively titled, *Deadheads: Community, Spirituality, and Friendship*, will likely be much better as a result as well.

Do I have any regrets? Yes, I do have one. I have moved slowly with this project because I was afraid of being negatively sanctioned for studying an undeserving population. I wish I had been able to choose to move slowly because of the possibility of being positively sanctioned for effectively engaging publics in sociological dialogue.

Recently Shirley Laska (1998) has warned us that we should not assume that research will continue to be rewarded and valued by the academy. She argues that in the current economic climate, faculty and departmental accountability will be part of the conversation about faculty roles and rewards in the future. The academy has already experienced the closure of sociology departments, budget cuts, the demise of tenure in some institutions, and, most recently, post-tenure review. Ironically, in order for research to be valued in the future, we may need to emphasize other aspects of our work as sociologists. The more developed the sociological imaginations of our students, media representatives, and the members of other publics, the more likely our work will be valued. It is not simply a matter of "doing applied research" to demonstrate the relevance of sociology, but of educating people so that they understand how to apply it. We can do it -- one public at a time.

As Halliday (1992) has observed, "sociologists are trained to talk to each other, not to informed publics" (38). This is beginning to change as new resources become available. For example, many fine teachers have contributed to the resources available from the American Sociological Association and to the journal, *Teaching Sociology*. These materials make useful suggestions about how to engage students in sociological dialogue. Boyle (1997), Levine (1996), Luebke (1996), and others (Fox & Levin 1993; Rogers & Adams 1994) have encouraged us to communicate effectively with the media. Pepper Schwartz (1998) and William Julius Wilson (1998) made comments on this topic during a plenary session at the 61st Annual Meeting of the Southern Sociological Society. At the same meeting, Donna Gaines (1998) and George Ritzer (1998) built on Herbert Gans's (1997) discussion of what makes a sociology book accessible to lay readers. The comments they made during their plenary session are published along with those of Schwartz and Wilson in *Contemporary Sociology*. In addition, I am sure some of you remember John Shelton Reed's (1989) Southern Sociological Society presidential address, have used Becker's (1986) book, *Writing for Sociologists*, or have consulted back issues of Michael Schwalbe's (1993-97) newsletter, *Writing Sociology*.

If anyone is to use the skills these scholars and others can help us develop, however, we need to find ways to change the reward structure in which we operate. I have found a way to be rewarded for the processes described in this article by serving as President of the Southern Sociological Society and, as is customary, having this written version of my presidential address published in *Social Forces*. Not everyone becomes President of the Southern Sociological Society and is given this privilege, however. I therefore charge those of you reading this article to help our discipline as a whole to find routine ways to reward sociologists for engaging publics in dialogue. This will most likely involve finding ways to expand criteria for promotion, tenure, and merit increases at your institutions and in the academy in general. It might also involve voting people into office in professional organizations who have effectively engaged publics in sociological dialogue.

In the meantime, think about one of your current projects. Remember, in the introduction to this article, I asked you to keep one in mind while you read? Think about ways you can engage publics in sociological dialogue as part of your project. Involve students in the research. Agree to be interviewed or even seek out the press. Learn to communicate with nonsociologists. Share the results of your research with the members of the population you are studying. Use theory to help them solve problems.

In closing, let me quote Johnson's (1997) Footnotes article again: "The promise of sociology is not simply to inform, but to revolutionize how people think." There will be no revolution if we continue to value communication amongst ourselves more than we value communication with others. Yes, we need to publish for each other in our specialized journals to further the advancement of disciplinary knowledge, but we also need to find ways to provide students, representatives of the media, and the members of the populations we study with sociological lenses. We need to find ways to assure that we will be rewarded for these efforts. In my humble opinion, the survival of the discipline depends on this. Hence I chose "Inciting Sociological Thought: Engaging Publics in Dialogue" as the theme of the 61st annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society.

\* Presidential address, 61st annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society, April, 1998, Atlanta, Georgia. In addition to those whom I implicitly thank in this article, I would like to acknowledge Rosemary Blieszner, Hadley Adams Iliff, Steven Iliff, Rachel Rosenfeld, and Rhonda Zingraff for comments on an earlier draft of this article, Stephanie Jennings for assisting me with bibliographic research, and thousands of unnamed Deadheads for their explicit support of this research project. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro supported this project through Research Council Grants, by funding undergraduate assistants, and through what is now the Division of Continual Learning by offering the pair of classes described in this article. I would also like to thank my mentors at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, and at the University of Chicago for teaching me that social facts are best studied in context and that engaging in the process of being a sociologist is as important as publishing sociological products. I am particularly grateful to my colleagues at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro for their trust and support and to the members of the Southern Sociological Society for accepting this exyortherner as one of their own. Direct correspondence to Rebecca Adams,

Department of Sociology, P.O. Box 26170, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170. E-mail: Rebecca(underbar)Adams@UNCG.edu.

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