

Humboldt Journal of Social Relations

Introduction from the Managing Editors

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The theme of Issue 34 of the Humboldt Journal of Social Relations is Social Justice Action, Teaching, and Research. The first article of this issue, “The Art of Social Justice,” features the works of a slam poet, Vanessa Pike-Vrtiak, an activist artist, Eduardo Valadez, and an overview of the social science literature capturing the role of art in social justice movements. The two artists featured are both active in their communities and worldwide via the internet, raising awareness about inequality, lack of access to resources, and barriers to social justice. Their work adds to the rich heritage of artists who came before them, who use their art to create safe spaces, help define social justice movements, create empathy, and inspire action.

The next two pieces focus on action and pedagogy related to social justice for queer people. Christina Accomando’s article “Social Justice Action and Teaching: the Legacies of Eric Rofes” is about continuing the activism of educator Eric Rofes. The article highlights how activism takes place on many fronts, including academic settings and in non-academic communities. The next article, “Designing ‘Queer’ Across Cultures: Disrupting the Consumption of Diversity” by Kim Berry, shows how a queer studies class was difficult to teach without recreating socially constructed dichotomies, and required looking further to challenge colonialism and hegemonic difference.

In their piece “Challenges in Minimizing Teacher Authority While Facilitating a Student-Owned Activism Project,” authors Nicholas Chagnon and Donna King utilize an anarchist framework in constructing an upper-division Sociology of Popular Culture class. Chagnon and King integrated core principles of anarchism, such as non-hierarchical organization and direct action (also being used in Anti Globalization and Occupy Wall Street movements) into their curriculum. Continuing with an exploration of social action is Chris Larson’s “Keeping People in Their Homes: Boston’s Anti-Foreclosure Movement.” His work shows how networks of grassroots organizations, legal service attorneys, neighborhood organizers, and homeowners work together to help fight foreclosure in Boston, Massachusetts after the 2009 housing market collapse. Larson shows how multiple movement tactics (including both direct action and the insider action) can complement each other, and how they form the basis for crucial negotiation tactics that can be used by homeowners facing foreclosure.

The final two articles continue exploring issues related to teaching and social justice action themes. These articles address the challenges educators face crafting pedagogical practices that disrupt hierarchical dichotomies of us/ them and server/ served. In “A Study Abroad Program in Tanzania: the Evolution of Social Justice Action Work,” authors Elizabeth Cannon and Carmen Heider document three study abroad trips in which student experiences were valuable tools in informing and helping construct the program. In the next article, “How Porous are the Walls that Separate Us?: Transformative Service Learning, Incarceration, and the Unsettled Self,” authors Coralynn Davis and Carol White share their experience teaching the class “Women and the Penal System: Knowing Ourselves, Our Communities, and Our Institutions” within a women’s prison. Davis and White built their program through Butin’s political and antifoundational perspectives on service learning to create a classroom climate that would break down perceived barriers between incarcerated women and university students.

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