

Ambrose Research Conference 2024

Social Sciences Session Abstracts

Social Sciences Session 1 – Cultural Psychology Research Collaborative I (Room L2100)

Dibora Mehari, “Pedagogy of Connection: Mitigating the Ideological Dissonance of Eritrean Immigrants in Canadian Education”

In order to justly host the 465,000 permanent residents expected to immigrate to Canada between 2023 and 2025, the Canadian education system is under pressure to accommodate divergent cultures and educational backgrounds of newcomers. This presentation discusses “pedagogy of connection,” which emphasizes relationship-centric education that mitigates the potential dissonance experienced by newcomers to ultimately promoting a sense of self-continuity. This study presents the results of three loosely structured interviews with newcomers from Eritrea. Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis allowed us to identify areas within which culturally sensitive changes can be made to optimally enable a pedagogy of connection. In particular, the study presents common experiences of dissonance and how pedagogy of connection can mitigate potential disparity, encourage self-continuity, and cultivate prudent citizens. Results are discussed in light of potential changes to the existing Canadian educational system.

James Cresswell, “On Democratic Engagement: Ironic Subjectivity as a Catalyst for Public Dialogue”

This paper starts from the fact that we dwell within a hyperreal milieu where technologically mediated life creates an ethos that prohibits public dialogue necessary for functioning democracy: people support their positions merely by feeling committed to them, raise boundaries prohibiting interpersonal understanding, prohibit critique, and discredit experts. Effective democracy is a telic concept – something to which we strive – that requires a mode of life opposite to this current ethos. Effective democracy is predicated on dialogue that, in turn requires, critical self-reflexivity. I argue that particular genres of thinking offer practices amounting to disciplines of mind that enable us to engage in effective dialogue upon which democracy is predicated. One such discipline of mind is drawn from Bakhtin and Kierkegaard: Ironic Life. Ironic life entails the powerful seriousness of laughter that can reveal reality, allow earnest engagement, and simultaneously allow for humble detachment. I articulate how our current ethos is actually without authentic laughter because it requires a kind of seriousness that is the antithesis of ironic life. By way of an illustration involving stand up comedy, I will show how moral and aesthetic life is predicated on an ironic mode where there is deep existential concern accompanied by humility needed for effective dialogue.

Social Sciences Session 2 – Cultural Psychology Research Collaborative II (Room L2100)

Karen Marin, “Personal Deindividuation & Inducing the Flow State in High Performance Athletes”

How can coaches and athletes predict and induce the Flow State – which allows an athlete to accomplish their peak performance without focal awareness? The present study examines dimensions of the Flow State and factors that play a role in inducing it. Premised on the idea that the loss of self-consciousness dimension associated with the Flow State requires an athlete to lose their sense of self. The present study examines the predictive power of deindividuation – the loss of an individual’s sense of individual identity. The present mixed-methods study utilizes qualitative interviews to compliment a survey that measured dimensions of the Flow State, deindividuation, and other psychological variables. The results from six collegiate teams (men’s and women’s basketball, soccer, and volleyball) illuminated the relationship between deindividuation and the Flow State. The understanding of the Flow State may have a substantial impact on the current practice of athletes and their peak performance.

Breanne Nickel, James Cresswell, “From Virginity Pledges to ‘Revirgination’ Surgery: Exploring the Link Between Moral Reasoning and Christian Purity Culture”

How has “purity culture” impacted the moral reasoning processes of young women in the Christian church when it comes to topics of sexuality? Purity culture is a subculture of Christianity targeted at women that places heavy emphasis on preserving sexual purity before marriage. In other communities that place similarly heavy emphasis on premarital virginity, women face severe consequences for not being virgins on their wedding nights. In these communities, many women choose to have their hymens repaired in an elective surgery called hymenoplasty. The similarities between these types of communities and Christian purity culture cannot be overlooked. As such, the present study explores the moral reasoning processes of young Christian women as they work their way through three morally ambiguous vignettes on the topics of hymenoplasty, abortion, and virginity pledges. Analysis of these unstructured qualitative interviews revealed discursive patterns that highlight how purity culture informs the moral reasoning that emerges in embodied interactions. Such patterns include the use of warranting devices, which are employed by participants to strengthen their position, and impression management devices, which are employed by participants to manage how they are being perceived, among others. Results will be discussed in relation to prominent feminist thinkers and current healthcare practices. The discussion will also include recommended actions for supporting women’s rights within these religious communities and contexts.

Social Sciences Session 3 – Individual and Societal Wellbeing (Room L2100)

Emanuel Cusanelli, Caleb Carlson, “Mental Health and Illness in Canadian Congregations”

Building on a study with the Flourishing Congregations Institute and Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries, this presentation draws on survey data with over 700 church leaders and attenders across Christian congregations in Canada. We address two topics: 1) the attitudes and perceptions regarding mental health, mental illness, and mental health challenges in Canadian Christian congregations; and 2) congregational supports and resources related to supporting mental health and wellbeing. Analysis of the descriptive statistics reveal three key findings. First, while many believe congregations ought to support people’s mental health and wellbeing, many gaps exist in terms of what supports congregations provide. Second, social stigma associated with those who have personal experience with mental illness or mental health challenges appears to be relatively low in congregations. Third, many survey respondents appear to favour natural or scientific versus overtly spiritual explanations and responses to mental health and illness.

Joni Avram, “Can Virtue Be Caught?”

People often connect virtue with discipline. Virtue is said to be gained through conscious practice, mindful choices, and accountability. But what if virtuous character could be gained more easily? According to social science, it can. Rather than acquired, virtue can be caught. Witnessing another person behave virtuously triggers a reflexive response of generosity and cooperation. It makes people want to be equally caring, generous, and courageous. It makes people feel more positive toward humanity in general. And it happens automatically. To explain why, Joni Avram, MSc. will present research completed for her Master’s in Behavioural Science that examined why people who witness virtuous deeds behave more virtuously themselves. The randomized controlled experiment (N = 500) exposed test subjects to the emotion of moral elevation and measured the effect on prosocial behaviour based on contributions to a public goods game. The research further investigated the mediating role of self-efficacy and trust in promoting prosocial behaviour. This research helps explain the process that links affective response with prosocial action, and supports the value of proactively sharing stories of virtue to cultivate a more virtuous and just society.