

Invitation to Astrosociology:

Why the Sociologist-Space Enthusiast Should Consider It¹

by

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Abstract

As a discipline, sociology has largely refused to address astrosocial phenomena (i.e., social/cultural patterns related to “outer” space). A large element of this self-imposed indifference/resistance relates to the general assumption that this neglected area of social life is not legitimate and thus not worthy of sociological inquiry. This essay takes the defiant stand that, not only should astrosociological issues be considered legitimate, any space enthusiast strongly interested in astrosocial phenomena must strongly consider astrosociology as the focus of his or her professional career (despite the potential negative consequences). This essay invites sociologists and other interested scientists to join in breaking down the boundaries currently excluding astrosociological issues from the mainstream discourse within the sociological community.

Introduction

This essay has a twofold purpose, presented in reverse order of its title. First, it addresses the following question. Why should a space enthusiast consider becoming an astrosociologist in the current subcultural climate characterized by indifference, resistance, and even possible negative consequences for doing so? Second, while this entire essay serves as a general invitation, it also offers targeted invitations to space enthusiasts of various backgrounds. Those

considering sociology are encouraged to become astrosociologists, including students, newly trained sociologists, and established sociologists willing to change their areas of concentration. The first part of the essay addresses the question above, which admittedly seems to have an obvious answer given the title of this paper. However, this question deserves attention in order to convince others to take seriously the pursuit of astrosociology despite potential risks. This general invitation is predicated on this assumption that astrosociology must be seen as a legitimate subfield before (1) a significant number of social scientists will consider changing their focus and “switch” to this new subfield, (2) departments within universities and colleges will consider adopting it, and (3) students will consider selecting astrosociology as an area of concentration. As such, this early invitation extends to those who are willing to accept a potentially difficult challenge. This open invitation intends to encourage well-regarded scientists who are also interested in “outer” space (as opposed to “social” space) to help forge the newly established astrosociological community. The recognition exists that the first few of those hearty souls who openly characterize themselves as astrosociologists must be willing to take a calculated risk. Those in the more powerful positions in the community, as well as those with high levels of prestige, take the greatest risk yet they can also potentially provide astrosociology with a boost of legitimacy.

The notion of *this* invitation, a title borrowed from Peter Berger’s (1963) *Invitation to Sociology*, is presented here with the same spirit and earnestness. This paper does not pretend to make the same arguments as Berger although the objective of application of sociological understanding to astrosocial phenomena does reflect a specific application of his general argument. A few of Berger’s insights receive attention in this paper with important application

to astrosociology. The overriding theme of this paper focuses on the failure of the discipline to apply his invitation to human activities related to space and the need to address it. In a sense, it amounts to reissuing Berger's invitation with direct application to astrosociology.

Application of the sociological imagination (Mills 1959) to astrosocial phenomena is relatively rare during these early days of astrosociology's existence (Pass 2004b) and thus the reality behind the veil as related to space-based social phenomena is arguably more unknown than the reality probed by most subfields. And, as Berger, Mills and countless others stated long ago, an important axiom of sociology is that things are not always what they seem, and thus require investigation to uncover underlying truths. Astrosocial phenomena occupy a different place than other social phenomena in the sense that rigorous sociological inquiry has largely failed to focus upon them on a consistent basis. Astrosociological issues receive little attention by sociologists at the current time due to three related reasons. If not ignored altogether, sociologists perceive them as lacking legitimacy, existing on the "fringe" of social life, and possessing few important consequences for society (Pass 2004c). As such, the true nature of this category of social phenomena may be even more surprising than anticipated by most sociologists.

This short essay will not attempt to argue for the relevance of astrosociology. That argument exists already (Pass, 2004b). Rather, it assumes that astrosociology, although new to sociology, is a legitimate area of sociological inquiry that is no different from other well-established subfields that currently enjoy large followings. This essay focuses on the argument that astrosociology is, while indeed a newly proposed subfield, in fact based on a subject matter that benefits from a sociological approach. That said, the initial draw to this new subfield is expected to be limited due to its unknown future. Why should a social scientist devote at least

part of a career to an area of concentration that may not exist in a few years from now? This essay cannot dwell on this unanswerable question, for the pursuit of astrosociology inevitably boils down to a personal decision during these early days of the establishment of this subfield. Early astrosociologists must work with the assumption of its continued existence. Therefore, with this assumption in mind, this essay offers a number of arguments relating to why the taking of this risk is rewarding for both the individual and beneficial to the discipline of sociology.

A Brief (Personal) History of Astrosociology. As probably the first person to adopt the status of *astrosociologist* formally, though now part of a handful of individuals, I offer a short history of astrosociology in its current stage of infancy. Its purpose relates to the demonstration that early progress, and thus a foundation for future success, exists for newcomers to astrosociology. (Please excuse the self-aggrandizing nature of this section but it provides the best articulation of the early history of astrosociology, as I know it).

I first uploaded the original version of the website dedicated to the promotion of astrosociology, *Astrosociology.com*, on July 15, 2003. Admittedly, it took a few months of thought and discussion with others to define the parameters of astrosociology; including the boundaries that identify what lies within its scope and what lies outside of it. Coining the concept of *astrosocial phenomena* (social and cultural patterns related to space) proved to be elusive for a while, as did its definition, though it came to define the purview of astrosociology fairly well in the end. Approximately 75 individuals have already joined *Astrosociology.com* as either “members” or “supporters,” though most consist of other types of social scientists, those from the space community, and very few sociologists. As of January 14, 2005, access of the

home page of the site exceeded 32,180 “hits.” While the exact number of unique visitors remains unknown, the counter only updates itself if a visitor leaves the site altogether and then returns by opening another browser or retyping the URL address an additional time. (Thus, it excludes those “roaming” around the site’s pages and page refreshes). This rather substantial number of hits indicates a serious level of interest among many of those accessing the World Wide Web; or at least an initial curiosity.

Elements of the American Sociological Association (ASA), I assume officers of the *Section on Science, Knowledge, and Technology*, accepted my first formal paper (Pass 2004a) for presentation as part of an Informal Roundtable at the 2004 meeting in San Francisco. Three interested parties, including myself, attended. The other two attendees were Dr. Marilyn Dudley-Rowley and Thomas Gangale (both of *OPS-Alaska.com*) whom I met for the first time at this event. Obviously, this small turnout was a bit disappointing. Nevertheless, the three of us used our time at the conference to discuss many important issues. Dr. Dudley-Rowley and Mr. Gangale considered themselves astrosociologists following that conference. Additionally, I initiated a second event at this same conference on my own accord calling it: *Astrosociology: Establishment of a New Subfield*. I simply reserved a room to allow interested individuals to attend a general discussion focused on constructing a new subdiscipline called “astrosociology.” Dr. Dudley-Rowley and Mr. Gangale joined me as presenters, along with approximately ten additional attendees. We partook in a very interesting discussion related to sociology’s lack of attention to astrosocial phenomena (including conjectures why this is so) as well as what it will require to actually establish astrosociology with the blessing of the sociological community. As normally seems to occur, those interested in space exploration become excited about the prospect

once hearing the concept of astrosociology explained properly. Those not so sure this new subfield merits establishment at first at least come to recognize its potential contributions even if they express no personal interest in pursuing it. Interestingly, no critics attended either event even though they promised to challenge this overall effort via blogs and email messages.

In October of 2004, I presented two additional papers at the California Sociological Association (CSA) conference in Riverside, CA. CSA officers provided me with the opportunity to organize a session dedicated exclusively to astrosociology. I presented Part Two of my *Inaugural Essay* (Pass 2004b). Dr. Dudley-Rowley (2004) presented a paper concerned with the isolation of the sociological and space communities despite their mutual need for one another. Thomas Gangale (2004) presented a paper about the practical problems related to astrosociology. A good-sized audience attended and we enjoyed a productive discussion following the presentation of papers. Additionally, Dr. Dudley-Rowley organized another session focusing on “lost horizons” in sociology. While the other papers focused on different areas of concentration, my paper (Pass 2004c) offered a rather critical appraisal of the sociological community’s ongoing forsaking of astrosocial phenomena as we head towards the fiftieth anniversary of the initiation of the space age. The central hypothesis focused on the conjecture that space remains an area of study characterized by the sociological community as illegitimate and thus unworthy of a formal sociological treatment. Most of those attending this session probably never considered sociology’s avoidance of astrosocial phenomena, though those who voiced a reaction to my presentation thought the general situation was a bit peculiar and expressed support for the merits of establishing astrosociology.

Finally, a new opportunity recently presented itself for me to deliver a paper entitled *The Sociology of SETI: An Astrosociological Perspective* at the **CONTACT 2005** conference in March of 2005.² The backgrounds of the attendees at this conference reflect great diversity. They include social scientists, space engineers and space scientists (including from NASA), science fiction writers, and multiple additional individuals from various other occupational fields. I look forward to interacting with the individuals at this conference and the possibility of making important connections between sociology and other space-related scientific communities.

With most of these experiences already behind me, I move forward with confidence in the successful establishment of astrosociology. I realize that the road to success will not be an easy one, though I remain confident that (1) the void represented by the sparse coverage of astrosocial issues will become evident to others and (2) a substantial number of others will join this movement to remedy the situation. This invitation goes out to sociologists and all other scientists who also happen to be space enthusiasts who previously considered the study of astrosocial phenomena untenable on the professional level due to the discipline's avoidance of them. It is well past the time to move beyond space as a hobby for space enthusiasts and apply the sociological imagination to the study of space, thereby upgrading its status from a forsaken territory to the focus of a mainstream subdiscipline. I will recognize that real progress exists when I can begin to quote astrosociologists, other than the three of us, in upcoming papers and publications!

Why Should a *Sociologist-Space Enthusiast* Become an Astrosociologist?

The simple answer to the question above is “because it makes logical sense.” A strong interest in space exploration or astronomy *should* lead a social scientist to pursue astrosociology as the focus of his or her vocation. This question must be asked, but it is like asking the following sorts of questions. Why should a basketball fan become a sports sociologist? Why should the fascination of criminal behavior lead to becoming a criminologist? Why should the concern about the various types of medical ethics abuses cause one to become a medical sociologist? These latter questions rarely receive attention because the assumption is that a social scientist pursuing the study of other social phenomena will not do so in a biased manner due to one’s enthusiasm or interest in the subject matter. Yet the same standard seems inapplicable when a sociologist pursues the study of astrosocial phenomena. Any bias in this regard is partly due to a suspicion regarding the credibility of space enthusiasts. This includes the inaccurate connection made to UFOs, alien abduction claims, cattle mutilations, crop circles, and the like. The preponderance of unscientific approaches to understanding astrosocial phenomena definitely contributes to the problem. However, this double standard is unwarranted, and thus it necessitates removal as a barrier to the pursuit of astrosociology.

Is there truly something wrong with a space enthusiast becoming an astrosociologist? In this context, one must ask the following question: why would anyone pursue a field of study that he or she finds boring or uninspiring? Some people do, of course, for various reasons. However, if given the choice, most people would choose interesting vocations over mundane ones. Most astronomers spend their lives studying the heavens due to their strong interest in what they do. If

this is the case, then a similar question to the first one posed above is, can a space enthusiast become a first-rate astronomer? Of course, the answer is “yes.” One’s interest in a certain set of phenomena does not exclude that person from becoming a good scientist. In fact, the purpose of the two-part *Inaugural Essay* (Pass, 2004a; Pass, 2004b) seeks to generate interest in astrosociology while *Astrosociology.com* exists to foster development of the astrosociological community. Moreover, this particular essay attempts to present the basis for acting on that interest!

So, a space enthusiast can become an astrosociologist, which is not to imply that all astrosociologists must be space enthusiasts. One can study astrosocial phenomena without the need to be obsessed with space. The main approach of any good social scientist is to study the social phenomena in question, whether it is astrosocial phenomena or deviance (for example), in the same manner regardless of whether the topic seems exciting or boring. One may study a set of social phenomena because they are seen to be relevant or potentially harmful to society even if not particularly interesting. As mentioned above, such a selection of subject matter would be rather odd in the ideal situation because one is normally better off selecting something evaluated as appealing and thus motivating.

In any case, then, the important focus is whether an astrosociologist conducts science utilizing the Weberian notion of value-neutral objectivity. Adhering to the norms and values of science, and properly proceeding in accordance with the scientific method, increases the likelihood of proper sociological understanding without significant personal bias. Thus, it is undeniably possible for an astrosociologist to advocate greater space exploration, for example, and still study astrosocial phenomena objectively. As long as advocacy and enthusiasm about a given set of phenomena do not affect the proper conduct of science and research, then no

problem exists. This argument may seem obvious, but it is important to emphasize that astrosociology must be a social science and not simply a forum for advocating greater funding for various space or astronomical pursuits and programs. Astrosociology is a subfield of sociology, and it must therefore follow the same strong tradition of conducting science objectively.

A similar question comes to mind. Can a space enthusiast, who is also an astrosociologist, produce truthful research findings when a space policy decision is objectively bad or a space project is over budget without any chance of meeting its objectives? More generally stated, will personally held values overwhelm (or at least taint) objective science? This is akin to asking whether a sociologist, who happens to be a Catholic, can conduct research on a cult without imposing his or her religious values onto that group or attempting to affect its decision-making processes. The sociology of religion is an important subfield in which sociologists from all backgrounds receive an open invitation to participate. No questions asked. Any good scientist, including an astrosociologist, would experience few problems in producing research findings that reflect the reality as depicted in the data. Supporting a decision or program is not in the job description of a scientist; at least in the role set of *scientist*. This is the job of a space lobbyist, so one should be careful which “hat” one is wearing when conducting science versus lobbying for space legislation or program funding. An astrosociologist is a scientist and thus goes where the data takes him or her without bias in the outcome of the research effort. Such is the case for any scientist for this behavior is expected and consistent with the norms of science.

The particular organizational environment in which an astrosociologist works should also make no difference. *Practical astrosociology* is likely to become a common approach. An astrosociologist can work on a SETI project, for example, and still be unbiased in the search for

understanding of how SETI efforts influence society, the implications of a detected signal, or what the very search effort itself implies about the culture of a particular society. Gauging public support is an important function of how an organization dedicated to SETI operates. Education efforts are also part of its normative functioning, and an astrosociologist may be involved in carrying out various surveys and ongoing program evaluation efforts.

Personal Invitations to Astrosociology

Formally accepting the status of astrosociologist currently represents a difficult proposition although, even at this time, the newcomer is not alone. As a space enthusiast and sociologist, I have indeed combined my personal interests with my professional career. Additionally, it is important to reiterate an important fact. Approximately 75 sociologists, scientists from the other social sciences, and professionals from the space community already indicate strong support for the establishment and successful development of astrosociology as a new subdiscipline, even though not all of them are yet committed to formally referring to themselves as “astrosociologists.” Overall, progress continues.

However, *past* achievements fail to reflect the difficulty of the overall objective to create a viable subfield. Anticipated success will require the transition of a role set characterized by negative roles to a one consisting of increasingly positive roles. Today, the usual roles of social scientist (e.g., theoretician, objective researcher, professor or instructor, credible person) do not necessarily apply to the self-proclaimed astrosociologist. Rather, roles of the astrosociologist, as

decreed by critics, tend to include pseudo-scientist, funding risk, and potential outcast – and additional roles that are even much more negative in tone. Such a transformation requires dedicated participation and effort. It is by no means a “foregone conclusion.”

Does my call for the establishment of astrosociology represent a self-fulfilling prophecy or a fool’s errand? No one can predict the future. Nevertheless, the void in sociology’s coverage of social phenomena requires addressing. If astrosocial phenomena reflect ignored yet significant social patterns, then the self-fulfilling prophecy scenario correctly predicts the future course of this endeavor. Yet interested scientists need to participate in order to ensure success because one only knows that a self-fulfilling prophecy has occurred after its conclusion!

The real problem is not whether a space enthusiast should become an astrosociologist. As mentioned above, the problem lies in the fact that very few space enthusiasts formally refer to themselves as astrosociologists. Granted, this proposed sociological subfield is new, so very few social scientists (or any scientists) are yet aware of its existence. This will probably continue to be a problem for some time to come. Moreover, sociologists, for example, will most likely shy away from astrosociology as long as it remains isolated from mainstream sociology. It must gain legitimacy in order to attract additional scientists. Until incorporated into the curricula of higher education organizations, for example, it will remain a difficult choice for social scientists. This point made, it seems to me that a space enthusiast who is also a social scientist *must* strongly consider astrosociology despite its legitimacy crisis.

My advocacy does not simply involve greater space exploration (my status as space enthusiast), but most strongly focuses on the study of astrosocial phenomena – that is, for astrosociology (my status as sociologist). My call is for others who are interested in this newly

proposed subfield of sociology to join the fray, to create an altered environment within the sociological subculture in which others are not afraid to commit to astrosociology due to possible professional consequences. The novel nature of astrosociology makes it an unknown quantity for many. The only way to overcome this intractable situation is for a substantial number of others to join the cause of making astrosociology a well-known, well-respected subfield of sociology. Bringing sociology into an area currently dominated by other social scientists (non-sociologists) and space professionals is long overdue considering the potential future impact of astrosocial phenomena (Pass 2004b).

If possible, sociologists and others with a passion for space exploration, or for understanding astrosocial phenomena for other reasons, should follow their dreams of uniting the two in the form of astrosociology. As related earlier, some initial barriers have been breached, allowing for the introduction of this new subdiscipline to the community. The early history of astrosociology does include formal presentation of astrosociological issues to the community. In the future, and potentially, efforts from a growing number of astrosociologists will eventually remove the stigma of this long overdue approach. It will lead to cutting-edge research simply because very few researchers have gone there before!

A Special Invitation to Interested Students and Sociologists. For Berger, the sociologist should involve him/herself in all possible levels of society based on a personal interest (though with an objective or value-neutral) approach, whether these social phenomena reflect personal values, or tastes, or even result in revulsion.

Thus his questions may lead him to all possible levels of society, the best and the least known places, the most respected and the most despised. And, if he is a good sociologist, he will find himself in all these places because his own questions have so taken possession of him that he has little choice but to seek for answers. (Berger, 1963:18).

It seems clear that it is important to remind those within the sociological community of these words in the context of astrosociology. Here we have a “level of society” that requires the same understanding as all others. The question is, why have most sociologists failed to ask questions about, and thus seek understanding of, astrosocial phenomena? I invite all sociologists with an interest in astrosocial phenomena to consider astrosociology.

Consider that no one can legitimately argue that astrosocial phenomena do not exist. These social patterns, like all others, are worthy of sociological inquiry simply because they exist (Pass 2004c). To become an astrosociologist, whether a student or an established sociologist, one must take the more difficult road. While it is much easier and safer for one’s career to become or remain a criminologist or medical sociologist, to become an astrosociologist breaks with long-standing tradition. The rewards associated with following one’s passion nevertheless overcomes the difficulty of the journey as do the rewards related to discovering new and long-ignored truths. To become an astrosociologist means to set out on a voyage of an unexplored sociological territory. The *final frontier* refers to the undiscovered territory related to the discipline as well as the cosmos (Pass 2004c). For those who really want to understand the astrosocial phenomena related to this final frontier from a sociological perspective, the short-term costs require payment before the long-term benefits manifest themselves as this new subfield enhances its credibility.

All those deciding to pursue astrosociology must possess the courage to become astrosociologists in spite of the perceptions of some who question the legitimacy of this substantive area. They can expect rejection, scoffing, indifference, and a host of other negative reactions to their pursuit of astrosociology. Yet they possess great potential in overcoming these difficulties.

Students majoring in sociology, or those considering it, merit a special invitation. The first step in the research process is the selection of a topic. Because students continually fail to select this topic, I strongly encourage interested students to select astrosocial phenomena. As such, I invite all sociologists with an interest in astrosocial phenomena to consider astrosociology. Perhaps it is a bit easier for students than established sociologists to do so in the sense that they have no reputation to protect. On the other hand, students may encounter professors who decline to accept astrosociological issues as legitimate topics for research papers, theses, or dissertations. Students with an interest in astrosociology should compel their professors to allow them to select topics falling under the purview of this new subfield. Potentially, students can be the driving force behind the successful establishment of astrosociology.

Established sociologists, especially those working in “safe” subfields, carefully contemplate a change to astrosociology due to the fear of such a drastic career change and the potential negative consequences in pursuing this historically forsaken subfield. This invitation extends to you with the knowledge that such a choice is difficult. Support from your department or organization probably remains a vital element of your decision. You are encouraged to find out if you can expect support. The dearth of research money available for astrosociology represents another important consideration. While it may prove to be difficult due to resistance and the lack

of committed funds, interested social scientists must press the issue and demand funding for astrosociological research. The fact that this type of formal support remains uncommon does not indicate that this social pattern cannot change based on committed actions for social change.

In conclusion, I invite interested faculty members to encourage their departments to adopt astrosociology to whatever extent they feel comfortable including introduction of astrosociological issues and encouraging interested students to follow their interests in the area. Students are encouraged to follow their interests in the study of astrosocial phenomena. Those who resist such actions must be enlightened about the intrinsic worth of astrosociology as a new subdiscipline as well as the consequences associated with continuing to ignore it.

A Special Invitation to *Uninterested Sociologists and Critics*. For those who are indifferent because astrosocial phenomena do not interested them, this invitation possesses little meaning. While I probably cannot persuade the great majority of you in this category to pursue astrosociology, I invite you to support the simple establishment of astrosociology in a general sense. When asked by interested students and faculty, for example, please support the legitimacy of this subdiscipline and its right to exist. Do not dissuade students or others from pursuing astrosociology because you possess no interest in it.

Critics, to the extent that they provide rational negative analyses, can serve a positive function. I realize that a certain percentage of those in the sociological community disfavor the very idea of astrosociology for various reasons. This invitation therefore relates to the idea that you continue questioning the need and legitimacy of astrosociology while doing nothing to

sabotage its establishment or development for those who favor it. In this way, perhaps we can construct a better subfield that is sensitive to the concerns of critics.

A Special Invitation to Interested Non-Sociologists. Before the invitation goes out, please bear with this third-person statement of an important social reality. Sociologists come to understand the intricacies of conducting sociological theory and research through their academic training, and then from personal application. Non-sociologists, on the other hand, do not share the same training or background. Their assumptions differ somewhat if they are psychologists, social workers, anthropologists, or political scientists, as examples. However, they do nevertheless share a common ground as objective social scientists. Others interested in space in other capacities (e.g., engineers, astrobiologists, astronomers) do not share even this particular type of connection to sociology. Futurists possess diverse backgrounds including the social sciences and space sciences. Nevertheless, many of these scientists express interest in sociological issues through their writings and verbal expressions. Therefore, they can benefit from astrosociological insights and contribute to them.

Berger points out that the sociological perspective is valuable even to non-sociologists (in an argument involving a criticism of social work's adoption of psychological principles).

Sociological understanding can be recommended to social workers, but also to salesmen, nurses, evangelists and politicians – in fact, to anyone whose goals involve the manipulation of men, for whatever purpose and with whatever moral justification. (Berger 1963:5).

Using C. Wright Mills' (1959) concept of the *sociological imagination* as an additional element of this argument, one can argue that everyone can benefit from sociological understanding of a

particular set of social phenomena. Non-sociologists, whether possessing social science backgrounds, physical science backgrounds, or any other, can contribute specifically to the advancement of understanding within the astrosociology subfield.

An astrosociological perspective must be sociological at heart. However, while the core approach must be sociological, not all astrosociologists must be sociologists by training. For those of you willing to adopt a sociological perspective (at least to an appreciable extent), you are invited to participate. All interested non-sociologists who remain willing to adopt an open mind to sociological understanding should consider joining us. While the core of astrosociology centers upon sociological principles, non-sociologists can provide important insights as well, and their contributions are valued.

In summary, then, an invitation goes out to those of you willing to adopt a sociological perspective (to an appreciable extent) in order to work with other sociology-trained astrosociologists in a multidisciplinary cooperative approach to understanding astrosocial phenomena from a combination of related perspectives. A strictly sociological perspective, while theoretically the core of true astrosociology, fails to represent the most practical, or most productive, approach to constructing this new subdiscipline. As such, as interested non-sociologists who have much to contribute, your participation serves as a great additional dimension to the understanding of astrosociological issues.

A Special Invitation to the Discipline/Departments. Social control within the sociological subculture may play an important part in keeping astrosociological issues from entering into the common discourse among sociologists. No social group is immune to politics.

No person is immune to motivations related to the protection of personal objectives. Furthermore, longstanding structural social patterns within the sociological community may contribute to the evaluation of astrosocial phenomena as illegitimate elements of social life. In this context, one must ask whether “gatekeepers” in powerful positions in the community serve to promote this view, even if unintentionally, which could account largely for this perception. Regardless of their true character and influence within the sociological community, both indifference and resistance exist. Acceptance of this invitation requires overcoming these long-term trends and replacing them with new patterns of behavior.

I direct this final special invitation at the discipline as a whole, including departments of sociology and the other social sciences. In the spirit of Berger’s original invitation, this invitation goes out to the entire community of sociologists (most directly) as an important subculture. Its members should reconsider the value of astrosocial phenomena and participate in its exposure. At the very least, I request that sociologists in faculty positions support astrosociology by allowing it to flourish as any other subfield and putting an end to its forsaken nature (see Pass 2004c). If students reflect the rest of the population in the United States, an appreciable majority of them are presently interested in space exploration and the space program. By tapping into this interest, and even promoting it as an important component of the curriculum, departments can potentially increase the number of those taking sociology courses and even those majoring in sociology. This possibility requires serious scrutiny.

At some point, assuming that astrosociology receives support from the sociological community, I invite departments to consider the creation of courses dedicated to this new subdiscipline. As an initial step, I encourage departments to request their faculty to mention

astrosociology when they lecture about the *sociology of science and technology* and when discussing new trends in the discipline. Faculty members whose students indicate interest in astrosociological issues must not discourage it. Rather, students should be encouraged to write research papers, theses, and dissertations focusing on astrosocial phenomena. Thus, support at the faculty and department levels represents an important complementary approach for the establishment and development of this fledgling subfield.

Closing Remarks

In concluding his book, Berger points out that we are controlled like puppets on strings, though with a decidedly different capability than puppets.

We locate ourselves in society and thus recognize our own position as we hang from its subtle strings. For a moment we see ourselves as puppets indeed. But then we grasp a decisive difference between the puppet theater and our own drama. Unlike the puppets, we have the possibility of stopping in our movements, looking up and perceiving the machinery by which we have been moved. In this act lies the first step towards freedom. And in this same act we find the conclusive justification of sociology as a humanistic discipline. (Berger 1963:176).

This observation, when applied specifically to this invitation to astrosociology, points out an important reason to pursue the study of astrosocial phenomena. Because humans can understand their own manipulation, they can understand their mistakes and correct them. They need not continue the error of their ways based simply on historical inertia. Adoption of astrosociology is possible despite failures in the past.³

Based on the foregoing discussion a final question requires consideration. Why would a space enthusiast who is also a sociologist *refuse* to consider seriously the pursuit of astrosociology? The answer lies in its lack of legitimacy, and thus the very practicality of it, as discussed; but all unfamiliar forms of sociological inquiry must start under difficult circumstances. Taking the first groundbreaking steps reflects a most difficult commitment due to the absence of a sociological *safety net*. The first astrosociological pioneers must lay down the foundation for a well-respected subfield so that others can follow at some future point without reservation related to harming their careers or fearing that astrosociology will never achieve acceptance in the sociological community. They will be the ones who receive the greatest criticism based on their overt attempts to demonstrate the long-denied legitimacy of astrosocial phenomena.

If you meet these criteria of an astrosociological pioneer, please consider this an invitation to astrosociology and its potential as an important new subfield. If you are not a sociologist through education or experience, but willing to take a sociological perspective in the study of astrosocial phenomena, your invitation to join the astrosociological community remains open as well. Consider your commitment to this fascinating, yet neglected, area of sociological inquiry. In this appeal, I call for the reinterpretation of Mill's (1959) historic call for social reform as the embodiment of ***sociological reform*** – that is, the restructuring of the sociological discipline itself through the strong advocacy to adopt astrosociology as a mainstream, well-regarded subfield.

I wish a hearty welcome to those who wish to participate in the construction of a new and exciting subfield of sociology. For those who do not accept this invitation, due to a lack of interest in space, I only request that you consider supporting astrosociology's right to exist as a

legitimate subfield of sociology in a general way; that is, allowing it to prosper as a mainstream (accepted) area of concentration, if that is its fate. Astrosociology is a subfield that can stand on its own merits, and it should therefore receive serious consideration for the full support of the sociological community.

Notes

1. This paper was accepted by the ASA for presentation at the 2005 conference in Philadelphia, PA as part of the Science, Knowledge and Technology (SKAT) roundtables.
2. For more information regarding CONTACT and the 2005 conference, see the citation in the reference section.
3. An attempt to establish exo-sociology as a new ASA section failed in the past (Pass 2004b).

Addendum

This supplement addresses a practical reality. At this early juncture in the establishment of astrosociology, the best resource allowing the ability to do so exists in the form of the website founded by this advocate. This general invitation to become an astrosociologist includes the possible actions you can take at this time in the form of your contributions to the establishment of a growing and dynamic astrosociological community.

Practical Steps You Can Take Immediately. Participation in this undertaking is the key to its eventual success. Five positive steps currently exist regarding the construction of this new subdiscipline. You can contribute by going to *Astrosociology.com* and taking one or more of the following actions:

- (1) join the astrosociological community by joining us as a *member* or *supporter*;¹
- (2) “sign” the *Astrosociology Section-in-Formation Petition*;²
- (3) reveal your support to others by adding your information to the *Directory*;³
- (4) submit a paper concerning astrosociological issues to the site,⁴
- (5) send a donation of any size.⁵

This section relates directly to my personal efforts to encourage the construction of astrosociology as a new subfield through the first website dedicated to this cause. Those who formally join the astrosociological community in this way receive updates about new events and news concerning astrosociological issues. You can do this long before even committing to a formal change in your career path. Once reaching a threshold of documented support, and once astrosociology becomes an established section-in-formation within the ASA, sociologists (who are also space enthusiasts), space enthusiasts in other social science disciplines, and space enthusiasts who are not social scientists can then declare themselves *astrosociologists* with fewer potential negative consequences and proceed to build this new body of knowledge and literature.

To all sociologists and other interested scientists, I thank you for considering my invitation and hope to collaborate with you soon as fellow astrosociologists.

Notes

1. To join as a *member* (requires membership dues) or a *supporter* (no dues) at *Astrosociology.com*, go to the following URL: <http://www.astrosociology.com/membership.html>.
2. Sign the petition on the following page: <http://www.astrosociology.com/sectinform.html>.
3. See the membership page for information concerning donations (see note #3).
4. See the submission page for instructions regarding the submission of a paper at the following URL: <http://www.astrosociology.com/submit.html>. There, you will find a rather lengthy list of topics from which to choose.
5. Donation information exists on the membership page (see note #3).

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