

## CENTRAL NEW YORK NEWS

### Real-Time News Updates for Syracuse and CNY

# Oswego prof: Trading shame for fame is now the norm

by Kathy Coffta Sims / The Post-Standard

Wednesday October 08, 2008, 9:28 AM



Jim Commentucci / The Post-Standard Tim Delaney, professor at State University College at Oswego, leads a discussion in his sociology class Sept. 23. Part of Delaney's material for the day is projected onto his head as he steps in and out of the beam.

Oswego, NY -- Public humiliation.

Most of us avoid it at all costs, preferring to stay out of the spotlight as we make our way through life. Some of us, though, crave attention, and are willing to do anything to get it. Even if that means acting foolish in public and holding ourselves up to ridicule. Think William Hung and his widely panned performance of Ricky Martin's "She Bangs" on the television show "American Idol."

#### **Book signing**

Tim Delaney will sign copies of his book from noon to 2 p.m. Saturday at the Blarney Stone Restaurant in Auburn. For information on "Shameful Behaviors," or Delaney's other books, visit [his Web site](#).

According to Auburn native Tim Delaney, a professor of sociology at the State University College at Oswego, we are now in an era when shamelessness has started to dominate behavior in much of American society.

Delaney, who has written books on the social significance of "The Simpsons" and "Seinfeld," says there are many reasons society's view toward outrageous behaviors has changed.

"People are less likely to experience shame today for the same behaviors that would have been deemed shameful in the past," Delaney said.

Delaney, whose latest book is "Shameful Behaviors," says the popularity of television reality shows feeds into this phenomenon as more people search for their "15 minutes of fame."

"Acting shamelessly appears to be the latest rage being taken advantage of by TV reality shows," he said. Delaney says that today's trend toward public shaming can be traced to the Puritans.

"Although we no longer have 'stocks' or force adulterers to wear a shaming patch, a number of public, or formal shamings, occur today."

He said those include the military court-martial, the use of sex offender registries and the printing of judgments and bankruptcies in most newspapers.

Delaney said Internet social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace feed into society's obsession with public shamings.

"The younger generation is especially likely to post shameful photos of themselves," he said.

When doing research for the book, Delaney said he spoke to college students who admitted to posting photos of themselves in compromising positions on the Internet. He said cell phones that are equipped with cameras also feed into the obsession.

"People love to take photos of others while they are engaged in risqué and/or shameful behaviors."

He said he warns those who do post photos of themselves to be careful.

"People who post shameful photos on the Internet should ask themselves two questions: 'Would I want future employers to see this? And, 'Would I want my future children to see this?'"

Delaney said he's found that people who live in the now, seldom think of future consequences.

"They prefer instant gratification in the form of positive attention from their peers and friends," he said.

Delaney said he believes people acting foolishly entertain the general public and feed an appetite for "justice."

"Our society's appetite for public degradation of people speaks to the mean and vengeful capacity of human beings."

Delaney said celebrities, who crave attention, appear to be willing to be publicly shamed if it will keep them in the spotlight.

He points to Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, Paris Hilton, Johnny Knoxville and Hung, as examples of stars who have profited from a willingness to further their popularity using public indiscretions.