Special Edition: Sociology and the Family

Sociological research and perspectives on the family have shifted greatly over the past 60 years. In the 1950’s sociologist Talcott Parsons wrote about how the family served two primary functions - to socialize children and stabilize adult personalities. However his and others’ depictions have been criticized by contemporary scholars for idealizing the white, middle class, nuclear American family, while ignoring both gender inequality within the family and diversity in family forms.

In the 1980’s sociologist Arlie Hochschild conducted research that highlighted the different experiences of men and women both in marriage and after divorce. She also introduced the concept of the “second shift” which describes the unpaid labor that women do in the household after returning home from their jobs in the paid workforce.

In the 1990’s researchers began to broaden the definition of “family” beyond a heterosexual married couple living in an autonomous household with their biological children. Family research began to reflect the diversity of family life that has existed throughout history, including single parents raising children, blended families, cohabitating couples, same sex couples raising children, extended family households, and transnational families. These researchers also countered popular notions that certain family forms are somehow “dysfunctional” or lack “family values.”

Recent studies have revealed how larger social, economic, and political forces have caused marriage to be less relevant in organizing relationships, living arrangements, and life course transitions. Across the globe, the percentage of single (never married) adults has risen, families and households are smaller, and the proportion of female headed households has grown.

Family policy in the United States has been slow to respond to the changing needs of families. The U.S. still stands as the only developed nation in the world that does not provide paid maternity leave to its citizens. Growing inequality and a lack of investment in social welfare programs has also contributed to the U.S. falling to the bottom on a number of social indicators. When compared to other developed nations, the U.S. ranks last in infant mortality rates, last in child poverty, last in births to teens, and last in protecting health continuations.

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Alumnus Ed Rose receives Jefferson Award

Congratulations to department alumnus Ed Rose who recently received a Jefferson Award. Created in 1972 as “the Nobel prize for public service,” the award honors those who benefit local communities.

Mr. Rose attended a national conference of award recipients last June in Washington, D.C. After several days of seminars, Mr. Rose was honored at an awards ceremony held at Constitution Hall. His trip was sponsored by KABC-TV (Channel 7 in Los Angeles).

The other recipients of the Jacqueline Onassis Kennedy Award for Public Service included CIA Director General David Petraeus; musicians Harry Connick Jr. and Branford Marsalis; sports celebrities Pat LaFontaine, Charlie Kimball, and Jim Kelly.

Mr. Rose was a member of the third graduating class of San Fernando Valley State College, before it became California State University, Northridge. He returned in the 1970s to pursue further study in History, Chicano Studies, and Marriage and Family Counseling where he learned skills for communicating with clients.

Not long after graduating, he and three colleagues started an operation in his garage to provide support to those in need, and named it MEND, for Meeting Each Need with Dignity.

That effort has grown to include the largest food bank in the area, a clothing bank, showers and meals for the homeless, extensive educational programs including GED preparation and ESL classes, and 10,000 square feet of space for medical, dental and eye care clinics.

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Family in today's society represents different things to different people. According to Charles Zastrow, a family is defined as “a group of people related by marriage, ancestry, or adoption who live together in a common household.” He also indicates that family generally is classified as an extended family and a nuclear family. An extended family “consists of a number of relatives living together” and a nuclear family “consists of a married couple and their children living together.” However, these definitions vary in our society today as many groups view themselves as families, but may not meet the stated definitions.

My extended family, in relation to this article, is the broader community of CSUN, specifically the Sociology Department, consisting of approximately 1,850 undergraduate students, 75 graduate students, 23 tenure-tenure track faculty, approximately 20 adjunct faculty, two staff, one adviser, two student assistants and several thousand alumni.

The mission of the department states, “The Sociology Department and faculty are committed to creating a supportive environment for student centered learning and achievement. Our students are exposed to all aspects of sociology and acquire sociological perspectives and the techniques for studying society.”

With this in mind, as Chair, I try to ensure that all of our students have the opportunity to reach their educational potential by providing them all the resources available to the department that they will need to have the opportunity to be successful in their educational endeavors at CSUN, whatever they are, employment or graduate school.

My nuclear family consists of my wife, our four children and two grandchildren. My wife and I met at the beginning of our United States Peace Corps (USPC) training on September 29, 1969. We both completed our training and served as USPC volunteers in Kenya in an Education Program as middle school teachers in “harambee” schools.

In 1985, when our three older children were 13, 9 and 7 years old, the family moved to Kenya for two years where I worked for USPC as Associate Peace Corps Director and my wife worked for the United States Agency for International Development Regional Housing and Urban Development Office for East and Southern Africa. The purpose of this “adventure” was to give our children the opportunity to live in a different country, culture and have an international educational experience.

Eventually, all of our children graduated from Los Angeles Unified School District schools and are graduates of California public universities. Enrolling our children in public schools was important to us because it gave them the opportunity to interact with others from the diverse population of California which would better prepare them to live and work in a diverse society. We did everything we possibly could to ensure that our children had every educational opportunity available to them for them to be successful in their chosen professions of medicine, entertainment, education and engineering.

Enabling our children to have an opportunity to pursue higher education is what I am attempting to do for all the students I encounter through my role as Chair of the department. It is important to me that they know that there is someone to help guide them on the path to educational success.

The educational achievement of my nuclear family has provided all of us the opportunity to have a chance to experience the “American Dream.” I would like all CSUN sociology students to experience the same.

Given that this issue is dedicated to the celebration of family, we wanted to highlight the release of a book published by Dr. Randol Contreras (spouse of CSUN faculty member Dr. Lauren McDonald).


Contreras situates his research against the broader historical backdrop of the South Bronx, describing how abandonment by local government, insurance fraud-related arson, and rising unemployment paved the way for crack-cocaine’s rise in the 1980’s.

It was during this time that Contreras’ study participants reached phenomenal heights and economic success in the crack market as drug dealers. However, by the mid 1990’s the crack market shrank and these men turned to a new more violent niche of the drug market - drug robberies.

As an insider who grew up in the South Bronx neighborhood he studied, Contreras self-reflects on his role as researcher and provides a compelling theoretical analysis, linking micro level violence to macro level social structures. He does this with eloquent prose and a writing style reminiscent of a Dicken’s novel.

The book has received high praise from reviewers and has been nominated for several book awards. Part memoir, part penetrating analysis The Stickup Kids urges readers to explore the ravages of the drug trade while masterfully uncovering the hidden social forces that produce violent and self-destructive individuals.

Interested faculty members can request a desk copy at: http://www.ucpress.edu
The Harper Family

by Heather Harper (Sociology Graduate Student)

This year, both my parents will retire after dedicating over 60 years (between them) to the education of thousands of students. It should be noted, however, that when I say retire, for my father this means leaving the full-time faculty position he has held at Moorpark College for 35 years, yet continuing on as a part-time professor at Cal State Channel Islands.

When asked whether he would ever officially retire, he responded, “No. I’ll probably die in the classroom.”

Both graduates of CSUN, my mother went on to primarily teach 1st grade and kindergarten, while my father dedicated himself to physics and astronomy.

Although some (of which my mother is one) may not think that the retirement of a teacher is an accomplishment worthy of formal recognition, there is nothing else that I can think of that could make me more proud and grateful than to have two parents who have devoted their lives to the field of education.

Unfortunately, it is too often said these days that educators have it too good—their pensions are too big, their salaries too large, their positions too protected, and their jobs too easy. However, those who say such things must not have had two teachers for parents. My parents never “clocked out,” so they were always on the job—be it grading at home, answering student emails, setting up instructional materials for the following day, going to faculty meetings, or constantly worrying about how to help a struggling student.

Growing up, I sometimes resented their students...thinking that they were stealing my parent’s time from me. But now I know that if one day I can be even half as good or as dedicated a teacher as either of one them, it will be a life very well spent.

I asked them if they had any advice for incoming teachers. Both agreed that this is it: to prepare to be poor, always try to be a “cup half-full” type of person, don’t dwell on the trouble students and remember all of the great students.

I asked them one last question: “Would you choose the same career if you could go back in time?” To which they answered, with an unequivocal, “Absolutely.”

The Bogumils

As members of the Sociology Department, we study families. We also represent families, of which we are members. We even constitute a family, in some very loose sense. But our departmental network also has actual family ties, with several pairs of sociologists within the same family. These include Dr. Lauren McDonald and her husband, whose book is highlighted on page 2 in this newsletter, as well as Dr. David Bogumil, Ph.D. (Purdue) and his daughter, Elizabeth Bogumil.

Dr. Bogumil has taught sociology at CSUN for many years. He and wife Elizabeth (who goes by Beth) were both born in New York and have been married for over 30 years and together have 4 children, enrolled at three schools: Elizabeth at CSUN, David at UCSB, and Michael and Matthew at SMC. Dr. Bogumil’s interests are quantitative methods and statistics, conflict resolution, criminology and medical sociology. Beth has an Ed.M. degree from SUNY Albany and is on a leave of absence from her faculty position at Purdue to write her doctoral dissertation on emergent literacy. Pursuant to their doctoral degrees, David's interests are Neuropsychology, Artificial Intelligence & Medicine; Michael's are Neuropharmacology, Artificial Intelligence & Medicine; and Matthew's are Corporate Law and Finance.

Elizabeth Bogumil is currently in her fourth semester as a graduate student in CSUN’s MA Program in Sociology. Her area of interests are directed towards quality of life and its relationship to urban design and planning. Additionally, she enjoys applying relevant sociological concepts to the study of pop-culture trends. Elizabeth has been married for three years to Sean McCallon, who received his M.A. from CSUN and teaches senior English and composition at John Burroughs High School in Burbank. Sean and Elizabeth met at the CSUN Learning Resource Center where they both served as writing tutors.
Undergraduate Student Award Winners

Bernard Thorsell Memorial Award (Option I)
Lorilyn Luong

Lori Anderson Memorial Award (Option II)
Jose Alfredo Torres

Russell Miller Memorial Award (Option III)
Monica Gomez

Wayne Plasek Award (Option IV)
Beatrice Purtyan

Outstanding Student Athlete Award
Molly Heneman

Jerald Schutte Award for Excellence in Statistics & Methods
Christopher Lawrence

Kian Kwan Award (Outstanding Continuing Student)
Martin Gonzalez

Chair’s Award (Outstanding Community or University Service)
Cecilia Herrera

Faculty Award (Outstanding Student Accepted to Graduate School)
Jennifer Castaneda

Top Graduating Senior Award (Highest GPA)
Michelle Vampan

Graduate Student Award Winners

Continuing Graduate Student Awards
Heather Harper
Elizabeth Bogumil

James Elias Award
Bobby Keo

Veronica Elias Award
John Landry

Jane Prather Award (Outstanding Female Graduate Student)
Karen Tractenberg

Top Graduating Master’s Student Award (Highest GPA)
Sarah Luery

Poster Contest

Undergraduate Poster Contest
1st Place Aaron Wilson
2nd Place Axel Cortes
3rd Place Stefany Azurdia

Graduate Student Poster Contest
1st Place Heather Harper
2nd Place Karen Sabbah
3rd Place Jade Pearce

Alpha Kappa Delta Sociology Honor Society New Members

Lucinda Adams  Anna Ghazaryan  Patricia Lara  Elizabeth Na  Andrew Rios  Patrick Stover
Ani Asatryan   Siobhan Goldberg  Stephanie Lee  Pricilla Navas  Carolyn Robles-Hernandez  Jason Thompson
Cecillia Barron Linda Granados  Angela Linder  Anna Page  Hernandez  Malissa Vanegas
Billiejean Carello Heather Harper  Jesus Lozano  Sandra Pinon  Shanae Russell  Sarai Virgen
Andrea Chavez   Lucia Holguin  Lorilyn Luong  Alex Puchniarz  Beatrice Purtyan  Mescal Wasilewski
Pei-Ni Chen     Amber Hosch Johnson  Megan McFadden  Lizbeth Ramírez  Amanda Small  Terry Woodmansee
Lisa Dorado     Kathleen Kessler  Jenny Melgar  Jennifer Castaneda  Kathy Somerfield  Amy Tarr

2013 Honors Dinner Awards

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Congratulations to sociology graduate student Bobby Keo who was awarded a $5,000 CSUN Graduate Fellowship for Research and Creative Activity. Twenty such fellowships were awarded across the campus and Bobby was one of four graduate students from the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences to receive this award.

Bobby’s thesis project developed from his own participation in the Greek system as an undergraduate student at UCLA where he saw the effects of alcohol consumption. His project seeks to determine the best predictors of alcohol consumption and his preliminary results show that high school alcohol behaviors, level of sociability, and fraternity/sorority membership have a significant impact on alcohol consumption. Further, his study expands on previous research by examining levels of sociability, not simply membership in greek or other campus organizations.

Congratulations to sociology student Roger Arias! A recent recipient of the Ronald E. McNair scholarship, he also has been invited to present his research at the Posters on the Hill event in D.C. The McNair scholars program provides support for high achieving first-generation college students who are applying to graduate school. The program only selects about 25 CSUN students each year.

Roger’s research is titled “From Crack to CRASH: Interrogating Normalized Discourses of Police Corruption.” The study “interrogates hegemonic ideologies put forth by the federal criminal justice system to understand how the drug war has led to police corruption.” In so doing, Roger develops alternative explanations for the Rampart police scandal in Los Angeles.

James David Ballard


Moshoula Capous-Desyllas


Michael Carter


Laura Edles


David Lopez and Ellis Godard


Ali Akbar Mahdi


"Obama and Intellectuals,” Andisheye Puya Magazine (Iran), January 2013.

Ana Prata


Jerome Rabow


Harvey Rich

Outside evaluator for a 3 year NSF grant, "Students Targeting Engineering and Physical Science (STEPS)."

Jeong-Hee Ryu

Fun with Symbols

In sociology a symbol is anything that carries a meaning that is shared by others, such as how a flag represents a nation or a heart symbolizes love.

Can you think of any other examples of symbols?

Symbol Hunt and Tell:

What symbols represent your family?

Invite your family to a scavenger hunt and search your home for items that remind you of your family. You're looking for items that represent your family members such as your parent’s favorite slippers or your sibling’s favorite toy. Remember to select an item that represents you!

After everyone has selected their objects, have a show and tell where you share each item and explain what it means to you!

Your Family Symbol:

Draw or create a symbol, such as a flag, that represents your family! You may include some of the items from your scavenger hunt or you may come up with new symbols.

Display your symbol for your whole family to see!

Color Us Happy!

What's So Funny?

Why are babies like hinges?
Answer: They are things to adore.

Did chickens ever rule the world?
Answer: Only in the eggsistential version of reality.

Did you hear the one about two snowmen standing in a field?
One asks the other: “Do you smell carrots?”

The Kid’s Page!

For the Sociological at Heart

Childhood Maze

Sociologists see children as active participants of the social worlds that they participate in.

Can you help these children find their way out of the maze?
Greetings from Our Families to Yours!

Michael Carter’s twin sons: Charlie (above) and Robert (below)

Ana Prata’s husband Pedro and daughter Clara

Amy Denissen and her sister Kari and nephew Isaiah

Jeong Hee-Ryu’s daughter Ginny and son Brian

Harvey Rich and his spouse, Magnhild Lien, and daughter Jessica.

Sociology student Erica Miller and her family.

Angela Constable and her dog Giggs
"Perhaps students who are more sociable are more likely to drink and I'm finding that's also a good predictor of alcohol consumption."

Bobby graduated cum laude from UCLA with a BA in sociology/anthropology. He will complete the MA in sociology this spring and is planning a trip to Philadelphia to celebrate with family. Bobby is originally from San Diego and he is an avid sports fan who follows the Chargers as well as the UCLA teams. Bobby was nominated by his thesis chair, Dr. Ellis Godard, and by Dr. Richard Moore, professor of management. Other faculty members supporting Bobby's thesis project are Dr. Jerry Schutte and Dr. Michael Carter. Please join us in congratulating Bobby Keo on this outstanding award!

As Mr. Rose described it recently, MEND "started from scratch, with neighbors in the community, and showed that when people get together and have perseverance, they can accomplish anything." And it has indeed been a neighborly effort: As he reported at the national ceremonies, the organization has "operated for more than 40 years without any government funding, and 95% of the work is done by volunteers, with only a small dedicated staff."

MEND continues to grow and recently received a grant to address the issue of food security. One component of food security is the ability of community members to easily access fresh healthy foods at an affordable cost. Diabetes is rampant in the northeast San Fernando Valley, where MEND is located. The organization already provides a number of programs to help people find out if they are diabetic, and to educate them about what to eat, how to eat, and how to take care of their body. And it has a garden at the center, which is 3% "green" by design. This new grant – thanks to the support of another neighbor, a local bank – will help establish 72 gardens with families in the immediate area. "This is an educational process to know what food is good for them, and to help them produce it themselves, locally, safely, and intimately."

At the national ceremony Mr. Rose encouraged anyone interested in volunteering to contact him for a tour of MEND's facilities. He also noted that the possibility of coming immigration reform has led to long waiting lists for a number of MEND programs. If the continuing demands for the organization's services and your training in Sociology motivate you to get more involved, we're sure that he would be happy to meet a new neighbor. You can, he emphasizes, "really have a major impact on people's lives, by doing simple things to help them."