Wishing you all a happy new year (and new decade)! I hope 2020 brings you good health, happiness, and a renewed sense of energy and optimism. The start of the year also is the time when we renew our commitment to the profession, quite literally. I encourage you all to renew your membership both in ASA and to our Medical Sociology section. Section membership brings us benefits like this fantastic newsletter (thanks to editor extraordinaire Evan Roberts), professional development information, updates on the latest scholarship, job listings, and a community of scholars with whom to socialize, network, and share ideas at the ASA annual meeting. Please consider inviting a colleague to join, or sponsor a student’s membership. The more members we have, the more opportunities we have to share our work at sessions at the annual meeting.

Speaking of the annual meeting, please consider submitting your work to one of our paper sessions or our refereed roundtables. The ASA submission deadline in January 29, 2020, and the meeting will be held August 8-11 in beautiful San Francisco. Our section day falls on the final day of the conference, meaning that we will have a “bonus” session, co-organized with Evolution, Biology and Society (EBS).

(continued)
Notes from the Chair (continued)

Speaking to the annual meeting theme of “Power, Inequality, and Resistance at Work,” we will feature a session on “Health and the Workplace” organized by Wen Fan. Our panels will also focus on timely topics including “Health and Health Care among Sexual Minorities” organized by Eric Wright, “Violence and Health” co-organized by Michael Esposito and Hedy Lee, and “Expanding Diversity of Biosocial Research: Opportunities & Challenges,” co-organized by Jacob Cheadle and Bridget Goosby. I’m particularly excited about an invited panel entitled “25 Years of Fundamental Cause Theory” organized by Jeremy Freese, in which we celebrate the 25th anniversary of Link and Phelan’s path breaking article. We will also have our roundtable session back-to-back with our business meeting, a festive reception, award ceremony, and much-anticipated 2020 Reeder Award address.

I am truly delighted to announce that the 2020 Leo G. Reeder Award for distinguished contributions and service to the field of medical sociology will be presented to Debra Umberson, Professor of Sociology, Director of the Population Research Center, and Co-Director of the Texas Aging & Longevity Center at the University of Texas at Austin. The article below highlights Deb’s pathbreaking research contributions to medical sociology, as well her many accomplishments as an institution builder, teacher, mentor and friend. Congratulations to Deb for this truly well-deserved honor!

One of the most powerful messages of Deb’s research is that healthy and supportive relationships are good for our physical and emotional well-being. This message is more important than ever, as the world around us feels increasingly bleak and unpredictable. In this new decade, let’s translate Dr Umberson’s research into practice, as we seek out and offer up the warmth, support, and encouragement that is essential to our collective well-being. Looking forward to strengthening these ties at our section events in August!
Call for Papers: 2020 ASA Annual Meetings

We will have an exciting set of topics lined up for the 115th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association in San Francisco on August 8-11, 2020. Paper submissions will open November 1, 2019. The deadline to submit is Wednesday, January 29, 2020. Our “section day” is scheduled for Tuesday August 11. Because we are on the final day of the meeting, we get a bonus session, which will be co-sponsored with the section on Evolution, Biology, and Society (EBS). Thank you to our organizers, who will be assembling these sessions, and to your members who are submitting their work!

1. Health and the Workplace.
Open session organized by Wen Fan, Boston College (wen.fan@bc.edu).

The linkages between employment and health are complex, with health shaping the kinds of work one can do, and work conditions - ranging from physical hazards to microaggressions to lack of health care benefits - can undermine emotional and physical well-being. The dynamics among patients, health care providers, and institutional practices also bear on the quality of care delivered. The papers in this session explore how health shapes and is shaped by ‘power, inequality and resistance’ in the workforce.

2. 25 Years of Fundamental Cause Theory.
Invited session organized by Jeremy Freese, Stanford University (jfreese@stanford.edu).

In 1995, Bruce Link and Jo Phelan published their influential article on “fundamental cause theory,” arguing that socioeconomic disparities affect nearly all health outcomes and are resistant to change because interventions intended to improve population health disproportionately benefit those with the most economic, social, and political resources. In this session, presenters will discuss empirical and theoretical work that critiques, extends, and advances FCT.

3. Health and Health Care among Sexual Minorities.
Open session organized by Eric Wright, Georgia State University (ewright28@gsu.edu).

In recent decades, scholarly research on LGBTQI health has moved beyond HIV/AIDS and mental health, and now explores the distinctive risk and resilience factors of sexual minorities. At the same time, interpersonal and structural discrimination shape access to and the quality of care received in health settings. The papers in this session explore the health, health behaviors, and health care encounters of LGBTQ persons, and policies that affect the health of sexual minorities.
4. Violence and Health

Open session organized by Michael Esposito, University of Michigan (espsosm@umich.edu) and Hedwig Lee, Washington University (hedwig.lee@wustl.edu).

The escalating number of mass shootings in the United States triggers debates as to whether gun violence is a public health problem. Gun violence is just one of multiple forms of aggression that shape the health of individuals worldwide, including intimate partner, state-imposed, self-inflicted (suicide), workplace, sexual, structural, and other forms of violence and aggression. The papers in this session examine the complex linkages among violence, health care, health, and health care policy.

5. Expanding Diversity of Biosocial Research: Opportunities & Challenges.

Open session organized by Bridget Goosby, University of Texas-Austin (bgoosby@prc.utexas.edu) and Jacob Cheadle, University of Texas-Austin (j.e.cheadle@utmail.utexas.edu).

The use of biological data in sociological research has diversified greatly over the years to the point where various measures can now occupy different places in our theoretical models. With this diversity, social scientists are now studying how “what is under the skin” (e.g., genetics, microbiome, etc.) affects a range of outcomes and how social conditions “get under the skin” (e.g., epigenetics, HPA-axis, inflammation, etc.) to affect health and behavior. New techniques using signals “measured on the skin” (e.g., neuroimaging, electrodermal activity, sleep) are shedding light on how different bodily systems function in response to social circumstances. At the same time, critics question the underlying meaning and interpretations of such measures and raise concerns about biological essentialism and the representation (or lack) of marginalized populations in this research. The papers in this session demonstrate the promises and limitations of biologically-oriented data for understanding how social circumstances affect population health.

6. Roundtables.

Organized by Elizabeth Luth, Weill-Cornell Medicine (eal2003@med.cornell.edu); Lindsay Stevens, Princeton University (lms5@princeton.edu).

7. Awards Ceremony and Reeder Lecture.

Organized by Deborah Carr, Boston University (carrds@bu.edu).
2020 Reeder Award Announcement

Deborah Carr

Debra Umberson, Centennial Commission Professor of Sociology, Director of the Population Research Center, and Co-Director of the Texas Aging & Longevity Center at the University of Texas at Austin, is the recipient of the 2020 Leo G. Reeder Award. The highest honor awarded by the ASA Medical Sociology section, the Reeder Award recognizes scholarly contributions, especially a body of work displaying an extended trajectory of productivity that has contributed to theory and research in medical sociology, along with teaching, mentoring, and service to the medical sociology community, broadly defined. In the words of one of her nominators, “we didn’t create the Reeder Award for Debra Umberson, but we could have. It is an award for her,” due to her “enormous impact, outstanding creativity, cultivated wisdom, exceptional mentoring, and years of service all delivered within the context of a keen sociological imagination.” On behalf of the Medical Sociology section, I am thrilled to recognize Deb’s pathbreaking and award-winning research, exemplary service to our profession, and unparalleled mentorship and collegiality, training a generation of world-class medical sociologists.

This brief announcement barely scratches the surface of Deb’s many contributions to the field. Her nominators (James House, Bruce Link, and Bernice Pescosolido) -- all Reeder Award winners and National Academy of Medicine winners themselves -- detailed the impressive breadth and impact of her scholarship. I also reached out Deb’s mentees/collaborators (Cathy Liu, Rin Reczek, Patricia Thomas, Kristi Williams) and colleagues (Rob Crosnoe, Karen Fingerman, Jill Suitor) -- all major contributors to medical sociology -- for their insights. What emerged was a remarkable consensus that Deb is a scholar who has reinvented our understanding of social relationships and health, who cherishes social relationships in her own life, and is a boundless source of support, encouragement, inspiration, and yes, “fun” (a word that more than one colleague used to describe their work with Deb).

Deb’s research spans the subfields of medical sociology, sociology of mental health, family sociology, sociology of gender, and aging and the life course. In fact, Deb is a leader in each of these subfields, having received awards including the 2016 Leonard I. Pearlin Award for Distinguished Contributions to the Sociological Study of Mental Health from the ASA’s Section on Sociology of Mental Health, and the 2015 Matilda White Riley Distinguished Scholar Award from the ASA Section on Aging and the Life Course.
2020 Reeder Award Announcement

While many ASA sections like to claim Deb as their own, we medical sociologists are especially fortunate that Deb has dedicated her immeasurable talents to our section, having served as editor of our flagship journal, Journal of Health & Social Behavior (2011-13), section Chair (2015-17), and a member of countless committees, panels, and symposia.

Deb received her PhD from Vanderbilt University 35 years ago. At every stage of her career, Deb has identified an intriguing sociological puzzle, carved out a programmatic and rigorous set of studies to investigate this puzzle (often collecting extensive original data), shared the results of her work with our field’s most competitive journals, and left the door open for junior scholars and collaborators to carve out and take the lead on companion studies of their own. In this way, her scholarship and mentorship dovetail beautifully (and prolifically). As one of her nominators observed, “she moves the fields. She latches on to a domain of inquiry, identifies what needs to be known, and then…probe[s] using a sociological lens to produce deeper understanding…It is excellent sociology plain and simple.”

Debra Umberson with current and former graduate students at the 2018 International Conference on Social Stress Research in Athens, Greece. L-R: Emily Paine, Patricia Thomas, Debra Umberson, Michael Garcia, Rachel Donnelly

Deb is a rare social scientist who has published influential work using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In the spirit of Deb’s mixed-methods contributions, let’s start with the numbers and then move into the rich description of her accomplishments. She has published more than 100 articles and chapters, with her work appearing in our field’s top journals including American Sociological Review, Annual Review of Sociology, Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences, Journal of Health and Social Behavior, Journal of Marriage and Family, Science, Social Forces and more. Her book Death of a Parent: Transition to a New Adult Identity (Cambridge University Press, 2003) is our field’s most thoughtful and in-depth analysis to date of the impact of parental death on mental health over the life course. Her work has had a powerful impact on the field, having been cited more than 24,000 times (according to Google Scholar), earning her an h-index of 47.
2020 Reeder Award Announcement

Deb has been recognized by Thomson Reuters as “among the most influential scientific minds of our time, ranking in the top 1% of citation recipients” in their fields. Her impact is not limited to the ivory tower, however. Deb’s work is regularly featured in the media, including prominent mentions by CBS News, CNN, NBC News, The New York Times, TIME Magazine, U.S. News & World Report, and Washington Post, to name just a few.

Deb’s research contributions are remarkable for their depth and breadth. Four particularly noteworthy areas of contribution include the impact of family ties on health, the consequences of family bereavement for well-being, health and caregiving dynamics in same-sex couples, and racial differences in family bereavement and the consequences thereof for black-white disparities in health and mortality. She has been prolific in all four areas, with her research being supported nearly continuously throughout her career thanks to her success in securing highly competitive grants from the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and others. Deb’s work has generated too many important (and policy-relevant) discoveries to catalog here, but to name just a few, her work has shown us that the “nudging” (okay... the “nagging”) that happens in relationships helps us to live longer and healthier, by urging on salubrious health behaviors (and squashing bad health habits). As one of the first social scientists to collect longitudinal data from same-sex married couples, Deb and her colleagues have taught us that extending marriage rights to same-sex couples will improve the health of the United States. Her work also moves medical sociologists away from the old “deficit” model where LGBTQ health has been approached as a social problem. Rather, her research convincingly finds that same-sex partners enjoy many benefits in their marriages that different-sex partners do not. Same-sex partners are more likely to mutually support each other when one of them is seriously ill, and to have more confidence that the spouse will provide the support he or she needs if future health problems occur.

Most recently, Deb and her colleagues have generated groundbreaking insights into one of our most vexing concerns in medical sociology: the persistent black-white gap in health and mortality. In a brilliant set of studies, the Umberson team has found that Blacks are far more likely than their white counterparts to experience the death of a parent, sibling, spouse, or child - and they experience these loses prematurely. The stress and trauma linked to witnessing a loved one’s death is a risk factor for subsequent health problems. Put simply, Deb does research that matters. She helps us to figure out why some experience good health and others bad, and what to do about. This work stands to make the world a better and healthier place.
2020 Reeder Award Announcement

Deb’s influential scholarship and dedicated service to the profession would be more than enough to earn her rightful place among our section’s esteemed Reeder Award winners. Yet her mentorship has helped to produce generations of exemplary scholars who may join the Reeder ranks in decades to come. One nominator described her as “everything I could wish for in a colleague.” A former student and current collaborator praised her as “supportive, welcoming, and genuinely interested in the success of her mentees.” Another echoed that Deb is a “wise and generous colleague, a compassionate mentor and friend, and an approachably authentic human being.” Her colleagues marvel at her boundless energy and enthusiasm for collaborative scholarship, with one likening Deb to “a bullet train picking up speed as it gets ready to climb the next set of mountains,” and another describing their research collaboration as “so motivating and… enthralling… [She’s] like a personal trainer who invites you to run a marathon…you never thought you could do.” And, of course, there’s the “fun,” extending beyond the research office and into activities like “finding a hidden speakeasy in Montreal, walking around San Fran drinking hot chocolate, and shopping for shoes in NYC,” according to a former mentee. A current colleague succinctly observes “Deb puts a great deal into others, especially young scholars. She gives. She teaches. She leads. That is why she deserves this award. That, plus she is funny as hell, tells great stories, and has an awesome sense of style.”

This August, we will celebrate Deb in style. The Reeder Award will be presented to Dr. Umberson at the 2020 ASA meeting in San Francisco. Her Reeder Award talk will be eye-opening and filled with insightful observations that will inspire new research among many in the audience. I look forward to seeing you in August, as we gather to learn from and celebrate Debra Umberson’s outstanding contributions to medical sociology.
Call for nominations for section awards

2021 Leo G. Reeder Award

The Medical Sociology Section invites nominations for the 2021 Leo G. Reeder Award, which will be awarded at the 2021 annual meeting of the Medical Sociology Section in Chicago. This award is given annually to recognize distinguished contributions to medical sociology, especially a body of scholarly work displaying an extended trajectory of productivity that has advanced theory and research in medical sociology. The Reeder Award also acknowledges teaching, mentoring, and training, as well as service to the medical sociology community broadly defined. Please submit a letter of nomination and the nominee’s curriculum vitae to Andrew London (anlondon@maxwell.syr.edu) with the subject line: 2021 Reeder Award Nomination. Nominations are due by April 1, 2020. The nominee and at least one nominator must be current section members. Note: If a person nominated for the Reeder Award is currently a member of the Medical Sociology Section Council, the nomination will be deferred until the person is no longer on the Council.

2020 Eliot Freidson Outstanding Publication Award

The Freidson Award is given in alternate years to a book or journal article published in the preceding two years that has had a major impact on the field of medical sociology. The 2020 award will be given to a book published in either 2018 or 2019. The book may deal with any topic in medical sociology, broadly defined. Self-nominations are permissible and encouraged. When making your nomination, please indicate (however briefly) the reason for the nomination. Send your nomination letter by email to Margot Jackson (margotj@brown.edu) with the subject line: 2020 Freidson Award Nomination. Nominations are due by April 1, 2020. The nominator and at least one author must be current section members.

2020 Simmons Award

Nominations are being accepted for the 2020 Roberta G. Simmons Outstanding Dissertation in Medical Sociology Award. The award is given each year by the Medical Sociology section. The awardee will receive a $750 travel grant to attend the ASA meetings and an award certificate. Self-nominations are acceptable. Eligible candidates must have defended their doctoral dissertations within two academic years prior to the annual meeting at which the award is made. To be considered for the 2020 award, the candidate should submit an article-length paper (sole-authored), not to exceed 35 double-spaced pages (11- or 12-point font), inclusive of references. This paper may have been previously published, or may be in press or under review. A letter of recommendation from a faculty mentor familiar with the candidate’s work is also required. Electronic submission of the paper (MS Word or PDF) is required. The letter of recommendation should be sent directly by the recommender as an email attachment (MS Word or PDF). Please send all materials to Hedy Lee (hedwig.lee@wustl.edu) with the subject line: 2020 Simmons Award Nomination. Deadline for receipt of all submission materials is April 1, 2020. The nominator and nominee must be current section members.
Call for nominations for section awards

2020 Louise Johnson Scholar

The Medical Sociology Section will select a student member of the section to be the 2020 Louise Johnson Scholar. The Louise Johnson Scholar fund was established in memory of Louise Johnson, a pioneering medical sociologist whose mentorship and scholarship we are pleased to honor. The fund was made possible by Sam Bloom of Mount Sinai School of Medicine, a former colleague of Louise Johnson. The Scholar will receive travel funds up to $500 to present at the annual ASA meetings in San Francisco and attend section events. Selection will be based on academic merit and the quality of an accepted ASA paper related to medical sociology; papers with faculty co-authors are ineligible. To apply, please send: 1) a copy of your acceptance notification to present at the 2020 ASA meetings, 2) a copy of your paper, 3) your CV, and 4) a letter of recommendation from a professor who can write about your academic merit. Submissions should be sent via email, as Word documents or PDFs, to Pat Rieker (rieker@bu.edu) with the subject line: 2020 Louise Johnson Scholar Nomination. Applications are due by April 1, 2020. The nominator and nominee must be current section members.

2020 Howard B. Kaplan Memorial Award in Medical Sociology

This award is established to support graduate students doing research in one of the substantive areas that defined the distinguished academic career of Dr. Howard B. Kaplan, namely mental health, self-concept and health, or deviance, by providing funds up to the amount of $500 to contribute to expenses associated with attending the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA). Self-nominations are acceptable. To be considered for the 2020 award, the candidate should submit a CV and letter of nomination to Pat Rieker (rieker@bu.edu) with the subject line: 2020 Kaplan Award Nomination. Deadline for receipt of all submission materials is April 1, 2020. The nominee and nominator must be current section members.

2020 Donald W. Light Award for Applied Medical Sociology

The Donald W. Light Award for the Applied or Public Practice of Medical Sociology is given in alternate years to a book or journal article published in the preceding two years that employs the concepts and methods of medical sociology to an applied issue or problem of significance. The 2020 Light Award will be given to an article published in either 2018 or 2019. Nominations will be eligible for three years. The Light Award recognizes sociologists whose professional work or advocacy contributes to politically or ethically important challenges in health, health care, or health care policy at the national or international level. Self-nominations are acceptable. To be considered for the 2020 award, the candidate should submit a letter of nomination to Brea Perry (bperry@indiana.edu) with the subject line: 2020 Donald W. Light Award. Deadline for receipt of all submission materials is April 1, 2020. The nominator and at least one author must be current section members.
We are Wan-Zi Lu (left) and Emily Parker (right), this year’s student editors of the Medical Sociology Newsletter. Wan-Zi is a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Chicago, and Emily is a PhD candidate in Policy Analysis and Management at Cornell University.

For the winter edition of the student column, we spoke with Dr. Patricia Homan, winner of the 2019 Roberta G. Simmons Outstanding Dissertation in Medical Sociology Award. Dr. Homan completed her doctorate at Duke University in 2018 and is currently an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Florida State University. She shared insights into developing her dissertation research, challenges with dissertating, the job market, and transitioning from being a student to faculty.

Dr. Homan’s award-winning dissertation chapter, “Structural Sexism and Health in the United States: A New Perspective on Health Inequality and the Gender System,” recently published in the American Sociological Review, explores how structural sexism at multiple levels of society shapes health outcomes in midlife. When asked what inspired this research, Dr. Homan acknowledged the importance of reading widely and deeply to see what important gaps exist in our understanding of the social world. From doing so, she noticed that most of the literature on gender discrimination and health focuses mainly on medical settings, thereby missing a broader macro-level structural perspective. Therefore, she bridged multiple fields and theories to build her concept of structural sexism, such as fundamental cause theory, ecosocial theory, structural racism and discrimination, and gender theory. In developing new ideas, Dr. Homan’s main pieces of advice include: 1) read a lot of things that you find interesting and exciting, 2) put different fields in conversation with one another, and 3) rather than criticizing existing literature in an overly harsh way, appreciate its value and build from it instead.
Interview with 2019 Simmons Award Winner, Patricia Homan

Because Dr. Homan’s dissertation topic emerged from linking theoretical and empirical gaps in the literature, one of the biggest challenges she faced was finding the data to test her theories. To do so, she constructed original datasets across a fourteen-year period. She noted how difficult it was to find consistent measures over time, requiring her to be creative and pull from a variety of sources. She also applied for restricted data access and described how using restricted data was especially challenging because she was more or less on her own with the data. However, she had acknowledged having ample support from mentors and peers. She would like to publicly recognize and thank the members of her dissertation committee: Linda K. George, Scott Lynch, Jen’nan Read, Tyson Brown, and Laura Smart Richman.

On finishing the dissertation, her main piece of advice for graduate students was to “shift your frame of productivity.” Essentially, some days you may feel like you get nothing done, she said, but if you were at your desk thinking and reading, that should count as progress. You need those thinking days that may feel unproductive just as much as you need days where you produce tangible results. Personally, she also benefitted from a medical sociology student working group at Duke where she could share ideas and practice presenting.

For those who have multiple academic identities, Dr. Homan encouraged us to embrace this as an asset and find our people. There are others who share our interests and there is no need to be bound to one area or field—as her work has shown, crossing boundaries can be fruitful for science. This principle also relates to Dr. Homan’s advice for the job market: “Be yourself.” You want to find a place where you will fit and where your colleagues will value you and your scholarship to the fullest. The process of transitioning immediately to a faculty job was, as she put it, very intense. Having to juggle teaching and research proved to be overwhelming at first, but has gotten more manageable with time. One of the best practices she has adopted is setting boundaries on teaching preparations so that, no matter what, she has time to do her research. Her sage advice on transitioning from being a graduate student to faculty: “If things feel hard at first, don’t give up, it will get better.”

And with that, we’d like to thank Dr. Homan for sharing her words of wisdom for our graduate student column. Stay tuned for our next column in the Spring 2020 Newsletter!

Send us your thoughts and suggestions about what topics to explore to Wan-Zi wanzilu@uchicago.edu and Emily eap249@cornell.edu.
Health Policy

10 Must-Read Health Policy-Related Articles Published by Section


In you have written recent policy-related papers that you would like me to feature in future newsletter columns, please email me at smmonnat@maxwell.syr.edu.

Every summer I direct a course called Dentistry & Culture, part of the mandatory curriculum for all first year students at the UAB School of Dentistry. This class—along with bioethics (taught by a philosophy professor)—is one of the first classes dentistry students take at UAB, and it is a four-week course, meeting three days a week for three hours. I teach four of these sessions and choose instructors from sociology, political science, communication studies, nursing, public health, and biostatistics for the other sessions. In this column, I will provide thoughts on teaching sociology within a professional school setting, specifically reflecting on my experiences in the School of Dentistry. And in my next two columns, I’ll discuss specific assignments we use in the course and the experience of teaching a course with multiple instructors.

Dentistry & Culture covers a wide range of topics, including social determinants of oral health, the patient-dentist relationship, workplace issues (e.g., sexual harassment, family leave policies), the history of dentistry, the economics of oral health care coverage, drug prescriptions and use, family and intimate partner violence, rural health care, and mental health (their own and their patients’). Students write reflections at the end of every session, based on the readings, the class activities, the lecture, and their own experiences, and they complete two essay exams during the semester.

Teaching sociology within a dental school is a continual learning process for me and the other instructors, and every year we edit the syllabus and course material, working to make the class engaging, challenging, and relevant for the students. Through this process, I have three broad recommendations for sociologists teaching in professional school settings. First, we try to avoid disciplinary jargon, framing the course as a dentistry class with a social science approach rather than a sociology class that happens to focus on dentistry.
This doesn’t mean shying away from discussing major sociological theories, and we work major sociological principles (or principles from other relevant disciplines, e.g., economics, epidemiology, political science) into the lectures and activities every class period. This includes spending a class period discussing Andrew Abbott’s system of professions, connecting it to dentistry (for example, why medical schools and dental schools are separate entities). Early course evaluations criticized the class for spending too much time discussing what sociology is, a potential issue with this course given most of the instructors’ backgrounds in sociology and the fact that very few of the students had ever taken a sociology class. By shifting away from jargon and focusing on connecting sociological theories and concepts to students’ main professional interests, we still are able to draw on multiple sociological principles, but in a way the students find more relevant and engaging.

Second, we spend time every class period discussing how to apply sociological principles to clinical practice. A complaint from students in the first couple of years teaching this course was that we would spend most of the class providing evidence of the social problems but very little—or even no—time discussing solutions or actions to take. In revisions to the course, we still point out that most “solutions” to social problems discussed in our course require multi-level interventions and won’t be solved at the individual-level, but we also spend a considerable amount of time discussing actions that can be taken by students to improve oral health care within their future clinics and within their communities—both as dentists and as community actors. For example, after discussing discrimination LGBTQ people often face in health care settings, we talk about best practices for organizing a dental office to improve access and treatment. And after discussing evidence of sexual harassment within dental offices—especially experienced by dental hygienists, we talk about what policies and cultures facilitate this sexual harassment and how to create policies and cultures that would instead reduce it. This is all taught within a broader curriculum that describes the institutional and structural elements that create and sustain inequalities and power differentials. Teaching across multiple levels—as sociology is well-equipped to do—and discussing evidence-based approaches to social problems is an important way to engage students.

Third, as instructors, we continuously update the material to reflect the latest research and current day debates within dentistry. For example, we’ve given increased attention in recent years to the role dentists play in the opioid epidemic—especially in Alabama—and are continually updating this section of our curriculum based on recent research, latest statistics, and best practices. We’ve also increased our focus on the emergence of mid-level providers within dentistry (e.g., advanced dental hygiene practitioner, community dental health coordinator), paying attention to shifting policies around the U.S., Canada, and other parts of the world. Students are taught throughout their training in the dental school that as future dentists they must stay up-to-date on the latest clinical research and technology, and we model for them the importance of also staying apprised of new public policies, debates, and social research within their field.

I’d love to hear other pieces of advice for teaching in professional school settings. Feel free to either email me (mthomeer@uab.edu) or send me a Tweet (@miekebeth), and I’ll be sure to share ideas on Twitter or in a future column.
One popular topic of discussion in terms of academic careers relates to service work and the inequities of who does it. Two recent studies demonstrate that women faculty members on average do more service work than men faculty members. The first examined data from two large research-intensive campuses at a multi-campus public university in the Midwest (Guarino and Borden 2017). They found:

- Women faculty members reported performing 1.4 more service activities per year than men faculty members, controlling for race/ethnicity and field or department. This difference was most pronounced in the “campus” service category.
- In the social sciences women faculty members in departments with male heads performed more service than those women faculty members in departments with women heads, and this disparity is primarily in department service.

A second study examined gender disparity in service at a public research university (O’Meara, Kuvaeva, and Nyunt 2017). They found:

- Women faculty members reported doing more service than men faculty members, controlling for race, rank, STEM field, and critical mass of women in the department.
- When they divided colleges by percent women within the college into three groups (1%-24%; 25%-49%; and 50%-74%), they found that men faculty members in the colleges with the highest percentage of women reported doing more service activity at the department level and across all levels than did men faculty members in the colleges with the lowest percentage of women.
- When considering faculty rank, full professor and associate professor women had more service activity than men of the same rank, although this pattern was reversed for assistant professors.

Why are these findings important? Service is one of the triad of activities—teaching and research are the others—that are evaluated for tenure, promotion, and yearly merit increases, yet it is the least valued activity in most colleges and universities. Thus, if women are doing more service work, they have less time to devote to teaching and especially to research, the most valued activity. This gendered division of labor may also contribute to problems retaining women faculty and an average longer time for women faculty to be promoted to full professor compared to men faculty.
Career and Employment

Fortunately, these articles also offer real solutions to this problem:

1. Colleges and universities should monitor requests for service participation and change the allocation if gender disparity is found (Guarino and Borden 2017) and create public “service dashboards” that would allow the tracking of gender differences in service work for accountability and to enact change (O’Meara, Kuvaeva, and Nyunt 2017).

2. Department chairs and deans should be trained on how to fairly assign service work (Guarino and Borden 2017).

3. Reward systems should be adjusted to give more weight to campus service (O’Meara, Kuvaeva, and Nyunt 2017).

4. Women should be mentored on making strategic choices about the service requests they accept (Guarino and Borden 2017; O’Meara, Kuvaeva, and Nyunt 2017), although mentoring women to say “no” to requests cannot be the sole solution as women may be punished for such behavior by being labeled “cold, selfish, and not team players” (O’Meara, Kuvaeva, and Nyunt p. 678).

The two co-authors of this blog are fortunate to be in a college whose dean has created a service task force, of which Theresa is co-chair, to examine disparity in service and to propose best practices for departments. Thus, another solution we can offer is that if you are given the opportunity to examine gender disparity in service at your institution and to propose solutions, grab it! Be an agent of change!

References


Teaching Sociology to Prepare Students for the MCAT and Beyond

Since 2015, the MCAT exam has included questions about social theory broadly and the sociology of health in particular. Thus, undergraduate education in sociology has become increasingly important and popular. However, individual instructors develop independently materials for teaching the MCAT and pre-health sociological curriculum, leading to significant unevenness in what is taught and how.

To evaluate this unevenness and identify teaching and learning strategies for Introduction to Sociology and Medical Sociology classes, we conducted focus groups with 14 sociologists at the American Sociological Association meeting in New York in August of 2019. We discussed: How do instructors currently prepare students for the MCAT? What readings, activities, lecture topics, and curriculum are useful for sociology instructors who teach pre-health-career students? And, how does sociology matter for students with aspirations for careers in medical fields?

Preliminary analysis of the focus group reveals that sociologists prepare students for careers in medical fields broadly but there is unevenness in teaching to the MCAT test. All instructors who participated in the focus groups teach about health disparities and the social determinants of health. They use rich ethnographic stories to interest students in the lives of patients and caregivers. The focus group participants agreed that engaging undergraduates in the sociology of medicine is valuable because most medical school curriculum do not address the social model of health.

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Ananya Sarker
Yet additional preliminary analysis revealed that instructors take a variety of approaches to teach quantitative and qualitative reasoning, especially in Introduction courses. There was agreement among focus group participants that these skills are crucial to the everyday work of physicians and nurses, such as informing patients of options for care or explaining accurately the risks for various health procedures. Developing additional curriculum tools in this area is necessary.

Much of the unevenness in teaching corresponds with the range of pre-med programs in which sociologists work. Some sociology departments and universities offer several medical sociology courses, others only one or two. Some introduction classes focus more specifically on the MCAT than others. Some sociologists participate in MCAT prep or medical school prep courses, other universities do not offer specialized courses. Other instructors engage in broad sociological training and theory without a focus on medical school, but with a focus on subjects such as C.W. Mills' sociological imagination. The study will continue to analyze which approaches are most appealing to students, and which approaches are most useful for helping students prepare for the MCAT and beyond.

Ananya Sarker

Medical Sociology Section of the ASA
Teaching Sociology to Prepare Students for the MCAT and Beyond

The next phases of the project include a literature review of resources about the Social and Behavioral sections of the MCAT, a focus group with students who have taken the MCAT, a focus group with non-sociology instructors who prepare students for the MCAT, an archive of MCAT-related teaching resources, and additional teaching guides and activities.

Please email hxm56@case.edu with subject line MCAT MATERIALS if you would like to contribute teaching materials or receive a copy of materials generated from this study that are released to the public later in 2020.

This project has been funded by a Nord Grant from the University Center for Innovation in Teaching and Education (UCITE) at Case Western Reserve University.

Heather McKee Hurwitz is a Lecturer of Sociology and feminist scholar at Case Western Reserve University and a Visiting Researcher at the Cleveland Clinic.

Ananya Sarker is a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at Case Western Reserve University.

Gray’s Anatomy. https://flic.kr/p/4Ab4Ud
Interview with Bernice Pescosolido

To highlight the inter-generational connections in our discipline, we are featuring interviews in the newsletter where a young medical sociologist interviews an older and more experienced scholar who works in the same broad area. If you would like to participate in this series from either side, please get in touch with the editor at eroberts@umn.edu.

What is the future of medical sociology?

Medical sociology is an inherently interdisciplinary area. I think the future of medical sociology will be research that is working with people in the natural sciences and other disciplines. Sociology has a lot to offer other disciplines and can also draw on the work of other disciplines. We need to continue to reach out to other scholars and expand our reach into these new areas.

What areas of research in medical sociology are currently under-examined?

Future research needs to re-examine medical training and socialization of physicians.

Early work from scholars like Renee Fox, Donald Light, Fred Hafferty, and Sam Bloom were fundamental in understanding how physicians are trained. There is a rich tradition of this research - and this is where much of medical sociology began, but unfortunately it hasn't been continued.

At least to my knowledge, there hasn’t been as much recent research on how future physicians are being trained. The continuation of this research is important for a couple of reasons, not least of which is because it provides insights into other medical trends we might see down the road that’s based on this training.
Interview with Bernice Pescosolido

Some of your work has moved into the public sphere. For example, your work with Glenn Close and U Bring Change 2 Mind (a college-based program to reduce stigma of mental illness) has found much success with reducing stigma. Will you tell me more about the role of public sociology and how your work is viewed as such?

To be honest, I had no intention of doing public sociology. I was kind of dragged into it kicking and screaming. But given our own work on stigma and seeing how the lack of change might be due, in part, to the lack of a scientific foundation for change efforts, I wasn’t sure I could say “no” when others in the real world wanted advice. When Glenn, IU Provost Lauren Robel, and IU First Lady Laurie McRobbie took seriously my claim that social research was pointing to cohort replacement rather than population change, it was a “put up or shut up” moment. So, then we began to think about what change would look like and designing a program that is based on research. We were able to get students involved—both to create activities and to participate, following our first principle of “for students, by students”—and they did some incredible things. Now we’ve come full circle and are able to do more research on these kinds of interventions which has been really rewarding and interesting.

What general advice do you have for sociologists?

Don’t hang your sociology hat at the door. I see so many opportunities for sociology to function in our everyday lives, but people do not always practice sociology outside of their research. When we’re thinking about how we are teaching, mentoring, and going about our everyday lives and service activities, we have opportunities to practice sociology.

Also don’t take teaching for granted. We have an opportunity to make a big impact on students and reach people that our research won’t. I had a student just the other day send me an email. He took a class from me in the 90s and he said that my class shaped his life and career choice. He is a podiatrist and that word was never mentioned once in that class. You never know. We have a serious responsibility with the next generations. It is an opportunity we cannot afford to waste as we try to understand health, illness, and healing. The American health care system needs a sophisticated and educated citizenry if we are to escape the mess of higher costs and poorer outcomes than 30 other nations.
Welcome to the winter issue of the Medical Sociology newsletter, and to a new decade for our section’s activities!

My special thanks this issue to the authors of our two special features, Heather Hurwitz-McKee and Bianca Manago, with a report on teaching towards the MCAT and an interview with Bernice Pescosolido.

We have a bumper crop of publications reported by members in diverse journals outside the two main field journals, *Journal of Health & Social Behavior, and Sociology of Health and Illness*. If you have a publication of any kind from another source that you’d like to share with members you can always email me, or tag me when you share it on social media.

It’s wonderful to see so many books being shared, and I have already adopted a chapter for class from a book featured in a previous issue. I hope you will all find an article or chapter to read and share with students and colleagues.

**Publications**


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**Evan Roberts, University of Minnesota**

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Publication announcements


Alzheimer’s disease has not only profound medical consequences for the individual experiencing it but a life-changing impact on those around them. From the moment a person is suspected to be suffering from Alzheimer’s or another form of dementia, the interactions they encounter progressively change. Forgetting Items focuses on that social experience of Alzheimer’s, delineating the ways disease symptoms manifest and are understood through the interactions between patients and the people around them. Mapping out those interactions takes readers through the offices of geriatricians, into patients’ narratives and interviews with caregivers, down the corridors of nursing homes, and into the discourses shaping public policies and media coverage. Revealing the everyday experience of Alzheimer’s helps us better understand the depth of its impact and points us toward more knowledgeable, holistic ways to help treat the disease.

Baptiste Brossard is a French sociologist and Lecturer at the Australian National University. He is author of Why Do We Hurt Ourselves?: Understanding Self-Harm in Social Life.

David S. Cohen and Carole Joffe, Obstacle Course: The everyday struggle to get an abortion in America, U. of California Press, 2019

Obstacle Course tells the story of abortion in America, capturing a disturbing reality of insurmountable barriers people face when trying to exercise their legal rights to medical services.

David S. Cohen and Carole Joffe lay bare the often arduous and unnecessarily burdensome process of terminating a pregnancy: the sabotaged decision-making, clinics in remote locations, insurance bans, harassing protesters, forced ultrasounds and dishonest medical information, arbitrary waiting periods, and unjustified procedure limitations.

Based on patients’ stories as well as interviews with abortion providers and allies from every state in the country, Obstacle Course reveals the unstoppable determination required of women in the pursuit of reproductive autonomy as well as the incredible commitment of abortion providers.

https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520306646/obstacle-course

The social sciences have seen a substantial increase in comparative and multi-sited ethnographic projects over the last three decades. Yet, at present, researchers seeking to design comparative field studies have few scholarly works detailing how various ethnographic schools approach comparison.

In *Beyond the Case*, Corey M. Abramson and Neil Gong gather expert field researchers working in a variety of ethnographic traditions such as phenomenology, grounded theory, positivism, the extended case method, and interpretivism, to explain both the logic behind and practice of comparison in their works. The contributors connect the long history of comparative (and anti-comparative) ethnographic approaches to their contemporary uses. By honing in on how ethnographers render sites, groups, or cases analytically commensurable and comparable, *Beyond the Case* offers a new lens for examining the assumptions, payoffs, and potential drawbacks of different forms of comparative ethnography.

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Order online at [www.oup.com/academic](http://www.oup.com/academic) with discount code ASFLYQ6 to save 30%.
Books

Josh Seim, *Bandage, Sort and Hustle: Ambulance Crews on the Front Lines of Urban Suffering*

www.ucpress.edu/9780520300231

Use source code 17M6662 at checkout to save 30%

What is the role of the ambulance in the American city? The prevailing narrative provides a rather simple answer: saving and transporting the critically ill and injured. This is not an incorrect description, but it is incomplete.

Drawing on field observations, medical records, and his own experience as a novice emergency medical technician, sociologist Josh Seim reimagines paramedicine as a frontline institution for governing urban suffering. *Bandage, Sort, and Hustle* argues that the ambulance is part of a fragmented regime that is focused more on neutralizing hardships (which are disproportionately carried by poor people and people of color) than on eradicating the root causes of agony. Whether by compressing lifeless chests on the streets or by transporting the publicly intoxicated into the hospital, ambulance crews tend to handle suffering bodies near the bottom of the polarized metropolis.

Seim illustrates how this work puts crews in recurrent, and sometimes tense, contact with the emergency department nurses and police officers who share their clientele. These street-level relations, however, cannot be understood without considering the bureaucratic and capitalistic forces that control and coordinate ambulance labor from above. Beyond the ambulance, this book motivates a labor-centric model for understanding the frontline governance of down-and-out populations.

Josh Seim is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Southern California.
Call for Papers: 2020 Conference
Interdisciplinary Association for Population Health Science

Policies, Places, and Profits: Manufacturers of Illness and Health

Minneapolis, MN, 30 September - 2 October

Program Chairs: Jennifer Karas Montez and Shannon M. Monnat


Population health is shaped by the contexts in which people live. We are all embedded in geographic, policy, social, and economic contexts that shape our opportunities for creating a healthy life. These contexts have been rapidly changing and diverging in recent decades. Geographic inequalities in health in the United States and globally have widened; policy environments across U.S. states and across countries have polarized; and the roles of profit-seeking companies on population health has come into negative focus with rising obesity, the opioid crisis and climate change, and positive focus as reflected in the U.S. Surgeon General's initiative “Community Health and Economic Prosperity.” How do these various policy, place, and profit-seeking contexts shape population health? How have they contributed to exacerbating or mitigating the troubling trends and growing inequalities in health across the U.S. and world populations? How can researchers from different disciplines ranging from the biological sciences to the social sciences work with policymakers and the private sector to make real improvements in these structural and commercial determinants of health?

The theme of the 2020 IAPHS conference is “Policies, Places, and Profits: Manufacturers of Illness and Health.” The theme recognizes the influential work of John B. McKinlay, who coined the phrase “manufacturers of illness” to emphasize the key role of upstream factors, particularly political-economic systems, in shaping population health. IAPHS has made McKinlay’s path-breaking article available for members (click here).

The overall goal of this year’s IAPHS conference is to bring together scholars from multiple disciplines to share current research findings, frameworks, and methods; elevate awareness about how policies, places, and profits shape population health for better or for worse; facilitate new collaborations; and identify ways to improve health through outreach to policymakers, industry and the public. The conference will continue the IAPHS tradition of offering a scientifically engaging and interactive program, welcoming anyone interested in population health.

The Program Committee encourages submissions that highlight the promise of interdisciplinary population health science and action that can improve population health across the life course. Submissions from postdoctoral scholars, graduate students, clinical students, and trainees are especially encouraged.

Submission formats

◆ Panels of 3-4 related papers
◆ Abstracts for Posters or Oral Contributed Sessions

If you have questions about submissions, please contact: Sue Bevan
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385.800.7079