

# Q&A Section on Aging & The Life Course

## The People in Our Lives...

Spring 2006

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I feel blessed for knowing so many wonderful people who have served as mentors, models, and sources of inspiration (as well as, sometimes, perspiration). An important one in my life is our own Matilda White Riley. (I use the present tense because she is still influencing me.) Another person who will continue to shape who I am because of who he was passed away recently, Urie Bronfenbrenner. Before most of you reading this were born, Urie, a developmental psychologist and my colleague at Cornell, was talking and writing about contexts (ecologies) of human development.

What Matilda and Urie taught me was the excitement of learning, of growing, of developing -- as scholars, as teachers, as people. Graduate students sometimes feel dismayed by the amount they have to learn, all the books, articles and chapters in their field they have yet to read. The secret is to keep on reading, listening, challenging, learning. Urie would say wonderful things (I was fortunate to have an office first next to his, and then across the hall), like "One must proceed ahead confidently, even if not sure of the destination." That can have multiple meanings, but for me, it now is a commentary on academia...which, he would probably agree, should be "life in the discovery mode." Matilda, Urie, and others are inspiring because they keep on learning, keep on challenging what they thought was true, and in doing so challenge those around them. A Ph.D. does not confer expertise. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of, and a license to remain in, the discovery phase of development for a lifetime.

Who are the people in your life? Still influential for me are Glen Elder and Linda George. Both have been acknowledged by our section as "distinguished." Both live in the discovery mode. There are others out there, the people in your life who are sources of inspiration and sometimes perspiration. Why don't you nominate them for the *Matilda White Riley Distinguished Scholar Award*? All that is required is a single letter. One page, by April 5, 2006. To: Jacqueline L. Angel, Professor of Public Affairs and Sociology, University of Texas-Austin, LBJ School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin, P.O. Box 8, Austin, TX 78713-8925. phone: 512.471.2956; email: [jangel@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:jangel@mail.utexas.edu). You will not regret it.

I also continue to learn from graduate students...amazing people with creative ideas who teach me more than I can ever teach them. Unfortunately, they are toiling away, often stressed and isolated, mostly without acknowledgement of the wonderful scholars they are becoming. You can fix that. With another letter. One page, by May 3, 2006. To: Ross MacMillan, Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota, 909 SSB, 267 19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455. phone: 612.624.6509; email: [macmilla@atlas.socsci.umn.edu](mailto:macmilla@atlas.socsci.umn.edu).

See the back page of this newsletter for additional information on both these awards.

— Phyllis Moen, Section Chair

## Section on Aging and the Life Course 2005-2006 Committees

### Nominations

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### Membership

CHAIR:  
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## Section Announcements

### Final Slate for 2006 Election (listed alphabetically)

#### CHAIR

Duane Alwin, Penn State University

Karl Pillemer, Cornell University

#### COUNCIL (elect two)

Cheryl Elman, University of Akron

Laurie Hatch, University of Kentucky

Richard Settersten, Case Western Reserve University

Janet Wilmoth, Syracuse University

#### STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBER (elect one)

Sara Moorman, University of Wisconsin

Jennifer L. Moren-Cross, Duke University

Melissa Reyes, Indiana University

**DON'T  
FORGET  
TO  
VOTE!**

## General Announcements

### Recent Publications

Li, Yuniqing and Ken Ferraro. 2005. "Volunteering and Depression in Late Life: Social Benefit or Selection Processes?" *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 46: 68-84.

### New ASA section

The Evolution and Sociology Section-in-Formation of the American Sociological Association is designed to help reconnect sociology with the life sciences. Supporting this section means supporting a biologically-grounded, scientific sociology - a great development for the 21st century. For more information about this section-in-formation, go to <http://www2.asanet.org/sectionevol/> or contact Rosemary Hopcroft at [rlhopcro@email.uncc.edu](mailto:rlhopcro@email.uncc.edu). You must be a member of the American Sociological Association to join the section, which then costs only \$5. Student memberships cost only \$17 (plus the cost of one journal). Please encourage your students to join!

### NIH's OBSSR celebrates 10 years

Dear Colleagues,

It is our pleasure to invite you to the "OBSSR 10th Anniversary: Celebrating a Decade of Progress and Promise." Scheduled for June 21-22, 2006 at the Natcher Conference Center, the National Institutes of Health (Bethesda, MD) this event is intended to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) at the NIH, illustrate our accomplishments, and to look toward the future. We hope that you and your colleagues will be able to participate in our celebration.

We're planning an exciting program to showcase our disciplines' contributions to health promotion and disease prevention in the context of three cross-cutting themes: 1) cells to societal levels of inquiry; 2) fundamental to clinical to population sciences; 3) life-span/developmental phases. We will have presentations from two Nobel laureates and welcoming remarks from Dr. Elias Zerhouni. Investigators supported by a range of I/Cs will be presenting examples of cutting-edge, fundamental, translational, interdisciplinary, dissemination and policy research. We will highlight trans-NIH initiatives in which OBSSR played a leadership or collaborative role and will unveil and seek feedback on a draft OBSSR five-year strategic plan, using a "town hall meeting" format.

\*\*\*Information and applications for travel fellowships are posted at: <http://obssr.od.nih.gov/OBSSR10th/index.htm>

## Invitation to Review

Ken Ferraro, Editor of the *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, welcomes new reviewers.

If you like to be considered for reviewing manuscripts submitted for publication, please express your interest in an email to [jgss@purdue.edu](mailto:jgss@purdue.edu) and attach a vita or NIH biosketch.

Student reviewers are welcome. For more information on the journal, see:

<http://www.geron.org/journals/social.htm>.

## Dear Dr. Salc

Dear Dr. Salc

I am about to complete my PhD process and ultimately hope to obtain an academic position doing research. As I go on the job market this fall, I wondered if you could give me advice on a few things: 1) what kinds of experiences are most crucial in screening job applicants, 2) what are the main reasons for doing a postdoc?

Sincerely,

*Aspiring academic*

Dear *Aspiring*,

Over the years, I have found the screening and search processes to have changed considerably. Today, the most important thing seems to be having published, especially in a reputable journal, but even in a respected edited volume matters. (Had this been the criteria decades ago, Dr. Salc would never have gotten a job). Most search committees do not expect new PhD's to have published alone, or even as first author. But they do like to see evidence of candidates having the skills, motivation, and ability to collaborate with someone else in crafting a publishable piece of work, and actually bringing it to fruition.

I have found that even colleges that focus primarily on teaching tend to interview candidates who have published. So too do those recruiting people for research and government positions. Everyone wants a "scholar" and that appears to be operationalized as someone who has published something "scholarly." Just as degrees in higher education have become mechanisms for allocating people to positions, publishing seems to speak volumes about research and writing abilities and future "promise."

This is a good reason for taking a position as a post-doc: it offers a marvelous "time out" for research and writing -- an opportunity that may never come again in such quantity for the rest of your career. However, search committees seem to look askance at folks who have had a post -doctoral position and have not used it in "productive" ways (translate to: publishing off their dissertation as well as whatever data opportunities available within the post doc). The people who succeed in post docs are those who hit the ground running -- who have papers already in progress or envisioned, and set to work on getting them in the pipeline even as they are "trained" to use other data, methods, or literatures.

Unfortunately, just publishing is not a surefire ticket to a job. Search committees request copies of the publications, as well as of dissertation chapters, and most actually read them. In fact, it has been my experience that many people in a department read the work of final candidates, not just the members of the search committee. That means what you write has to be good.

— Dr. Salc

## Tips for Teaching

--Heather Hofmeister, Otto-Freidrich-Universität Bamberg

Welcome to a new column of the SALC newsletter focusing on teaching ideas for our aging and the life course curricula! Please send teaching ideas or techniques that have worked for you to: [heather.hofmeister@sowi.uni-bamberg.de](mailto:heather.hofmeister@sowi.uni-bamberg.de) and tell me whether or not I have permission to print your name with the tip. I will organize and edit the ideas into future columns. I will also draw from some of the ASA teaching resources, including "Teaching Sociology of Aging and the Life Course" Fifth Edition, edited by Diana K. Harris, "Innovative Techniques for Teaching Sociological Concepts," Third Edition, edited by Edward L. Kain and Robin Neas, and "Discussion in the College Classroom," Second Edition, edited by Jay R. Howard.

For this column, to get us started, here's a tip from the "Innovative Techniques" resource by Jeffrey Michael Clair. To demonstrate the existence of stereotypical attitudes toward the elderly in society and to measure individual perceptions of aging, Clair recommends asking students to number 1-10 on a piece of paper and to write down characteristics of an elderly person, in the order they occur to them (not worrying about logic or importance). After 2 or 3 minutes, students should again write from 1-10 and this time, give ten answers to the question, "I am an old person. Who am I?" Students should think only of themselves at this age, writing what they expect to be like as older persons. After several more minutes, Clair suggests either having the papers turned in and randomly read or asking students to volunteer, first the list of characteristics of an elderly person, and then the list of characteristics of the students as older people. The first list will reveal stereotypes of physical conditions, social conditions, or psychological conditions, but the second list is likely to be much more positive as students imagine themselves as older people. The discussion leader can then apply these differences to theories from the course which explain the aging process, explore how stereotypes may be perpetuated even within the theories, and bring out stratification and age inequality issues.

## Call for Proposals

### 2006-07 Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) Pilot Grant Program

Two pilot project grants will be awarded for innovative interdisciplinary research on adult health and well-being, with an emphasis on integrative approaches to understanding life course and subgroup variations in physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive functioning. All research must be based on the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) dataset or its satellite studies including the National Study of Daily Experiences (NSDE) and sibling/twin sub-sample studies. Grants of up to \$15,000 (total costs) will be awarded to investigators from a variety of disciplines.

For detailed information on the pilot grants and application process, see: [http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~carrds/midus/midus\\_home.htm](http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~carrds/midus/midus_home.htm)

Applications should be sent NO LATER than July 5, 2006 to: Deborah Carr, Institute for Health, Health Care Policy & Aging Research, Rutgers University, 30 College Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08901. For further information, call 732-932-4068, or send e-mail to [carrds@sociology.rutgers.edu](mailto:carrds@sociology.rutgers.edu).

## **Looking for a Tax Deduction? Donate to the Section**

You may make a donation to the Section on Aging and the Life Course and include it in your tax deductions. Your donation will help the Section by providing funds for its annual activities, especially the Student Paper Award. Make your check payable to the American Sociological Association. Mail your check, along with a brief letter requesting that the donation be placed into the account of the Section on Aging and the Life Course, to:

American Sociological Association  
1307 New York Avenue, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20005-4701

## **Calls for Section Award Nominations**

### ***Matilda White Riley Distinguished Scholar Award***

This award honors a scholar who had shown exceptional achievement in research, theory, policy analysis, or who has otherwise advanced knowledge of aging and the life course. Letters of nomination should describe the candidate's contributions to the study of aging and the life course. Additional letters of support are encouraged but not required. Nominations should be submitted by April 5, 2006 to: Jacqueline L. Angel, Professor of Public Affairs and Sociology, University of Texas-Austin, LBJ School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin, P.O. Box 8000, Austin, TX 78713-8925, phone: 512.471.2956; email: [jangel@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:jangel@mail.utexas.edu). Committee members include Christine Himes from Syracuse University and Fedric Wolinsky of the University of Iowa.

### ***Graduate Student Paper Award***

The Section on Aging and the Life Course invites original student papers on any topic related to sociology of aging and the life course. Papers co-authored with faculty members are ineligible. Papers already published are eligible if they appeared in print after January 1, 2004. Self-nominations are encouraged. An award of \$250 is presented to the winner at the Business Meeting of the Section, held during the ASA Annual Meeting in August of each year. Send three (3) copies of the nominated paper in the ASA format by May 3, 2006 to: Ross Macmillan, Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota, 909 SSB, 267 19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455; phone: 612-624-6509; email: [macmilla@atlas.socsci.umn.edu](mailto:macmilla@atlas.socsci.umn.edu). Committee members include Jill Suitor of Purdue University and Merrill Silverstein from the University of Southern California.