

Society for the Study of Social  
Problems

# Community Research and Development Division

## Spring 2016 Newsletter

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## Message from the Chair

by **Jess Lucero, Utah State University**



Dear Community Research and Development Colleagues,

I am looking forward to connecting with you at this year's meeting in Seattle. This year's theme, "Globalizing Social Problems," will spark important conversations within the Division in our themed sessions focused on race, refugee status, and civic participation and political empowerment in U.S. and global contexts. Additionally, thanks to Tamara Leech's vision as our past Division Chair, I am thrilled that we'll be honoring our inaugural Community Partner Paper Awardee as well as our Community Research and Development Student Paper Award at our Business meeting in Seattle.

Our Spring Newsletter contains important information thanks to our dedicated newsletter editor, Rahim Kurwa. Rahim has compiled a list of all of our Division sessions at this year's meeting, graduate student and faculty spotlights, and the usual information about member accomplishments and job opportunities.

I'm very much looking forward to discussing and celebrating the important community-engaged work you all have been committed to in the last year and hearing about your activist-scholar efforts!

Warm Regards,  
Jessica Lucero  
Assistant Professor of Social Work  
Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Anthropology  
Utah State University

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# CRD Sessions and Meetings at the 2016 SSSP Annual Conference

Friday, August 19

[8:30 AM - 10:10 AM](#)

**Session 3: CRITICAL DIALOGUE: Scholarship Grounded in the Community-Scholarship, Activism, and Community Research**

Room: Cascade I-C

[10:30 AM - 12:10 PM](#)

**Session 17: PAPERS IN THE ROUND: The Struggle for Space and the Right to the City: Gentrification, Housing Decisions, and Public Space**

Room: Cascade II

[12:30 PM - 2:10 PM](#)

**Divisional Meeting**

Room: Cascade II

[2:30 PM - 4:10 PM](#)

**Session 44: Disability and Community**

Room: Pike

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Saturday, August 20

8:30 AM - 10:10 AM

**Session 65: Head Start to Higher Education: Addressing Familial Poverty**

Room: Denny

10:30 AM - 12:10 PM

**Session 80: Housing, Homelessness, and Health**

Room: Denny

12:30 PM - 2:10 PM

**THEMATIC**

**Session 92: Race and Refugees**

Room: Denny

2:30 PM - 4:10 PM

**Session 110: PAPERS IN THE ROUND: Community Engaged Research and Teaching**

Room: Puget Sound

Sunday, August 21

12:30 PM - 2:10 PM

**Session 146: Civic Participation and Political Empowerment in U.S. and Global Contexts**

Room: Stuart

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## Community Partner Paper Award:



*Mayra Ibarra and team*

Diana Guelespe, Mayra Ibarra, Arturo Griffiths, Rogelio Cedillo, Carolyn Vilter, Austin Rose, and Laura Padilla, “Integrating the Undocumented Community: A Qualitative Exploration of the Process for Obtaining DC’s Limited Purpose Driver’s License.”

Congratulations to our inaugural Community Partner Paper Awardees, Diana Guelespe, Mayra Ibarra, Arturo Griffiths, Rogelio Cedillo, Carolyn Vilter, Austin Rose, and Laura Padilla for their important work entitled, “Integrating the Undocumented Community: A Qualitative Exploration of the Process for Obtaining DC’s Limited Purpose Driver’s License.” The authors will be recognized at our Division Business Meeting on Friday at 12:30 pm in Cascade II. Mayra Ibarra will be presenting this paper at our Papers in the Round Session: Community Engaged Research and Teaching at 2:30 on Saturday in Puget Sound. We congratulate them for their commitment to community-based research that is making a demonstrable impact and hope many of you will attend their round table session to learn more about their community-based work.

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## Outstanding Student Paper Award:



Orla Stapleton, "From Myth to Means: Place and Organizational Processes in the Gowanus Canal Superfund, New York"

Congratulations to our 2016 Student Paper Competition Awardee, Orla Stapleton. Orla is a doctoral student at Indiana University Bloomington. Her important work entitled, "From Myth to Means: Place and Organizational Processes in the Gowanus Canal Superfund, New York," draws on a multi-year qualitative research project and both organizational sociology and urban sociology to understand the complex dynamics of an EPA Superfund site at the Gowanus Canal in New York. Her paper tells a compelling story of community involvement and impact on organizational processes. Orla will be recognized during the Awards Ceremony on Saturday August 20th beginning at 6:45 pm in Cascade II Mezzanine Level. Orla will be presenting this paper during Paper Session 147: Environment, Law, and Regulation at 12:30 pm on Sunday in Denny. We congratulate Orla for her outstanding research and we hope many of you will attend her paper session to learn more about her work.

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## Spring 2016 Faculty Spotlight



**Beth Merenstein**

### **Central Connecticut State University**

Beth F. Merenstein is a full professor in Sociology at Central Connecticut State University. She has taught extensively in the areas of inequality, poverty, race and ethnicity, and qualitative methods. For the past five years, she has taught an 8 credit community engagement course for upper level sociology majors. These courses have included community engagement work at a homeless shelter, a transitional living facility, and a coordinated access network for those seeking help with shelter.

**How did you come to your research?**

I got into sociology because I thought that it was a way to address real life social problems and connect to communities and help address some of these issues that we spend so much time teaching about. As to my current work, I happened to be approached by a non profit organization that works with various homeless shelters. They were looking for an evaluation (of their homelessness prevention program) and having some experience with community

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research, I asked if they were open to having me and my students conduct the research and in the process provide them with a concrete product in the end. They were super excited, and that started that experience. And I've done that four or five times since then with different organizations.

**How do you find your work fits in with SSSP?**

Because so much of what I do is about engaging with students, I created a two course sequence. One part is learning the substantive material - learning about the policies and realities of poverty. The second part is the methods course, where the students go out and learn. They do interviews with homeless folks and they create interview guides and work with clients. They have to do all of that, it is an incredible experience for the students who get to experience what they're reading about out in the community. And I think that to me that's not just what SSSP is about but that's also what our division is about. How do you both provide a service to the community (connecting academia to the community) and making that connection for the students.

After almost every semester some of my students end up doing internships with the organizations they've worked with. I've had students go on to work professionally with some of those organizations as well. Other students have gone on to apply these methods in graduate school. I have a student now who took my course last semester, she's going to grad school in higher education counseling. She wants to make her entire focus on homeless college kids, based on what she learned in the class. College homelessness is an invisible population.

**Let's talk for a moment about research methods. What do you think is the role of community based research? What role does it fill in social science?**

I think that community research methods does fill a gap in sociology because we do more engaged sociology. We aren't just talking about social problems but we're working with communities to try to find solutions to those problems. And that's why I feel so engaged and passionate about SSSP and CRD. SSSP is one of those places where we can do that on a local level. Sociology shouldn't just be staying within the academic walls. We should be working with the community.

**I'm curious to know how you've seen the association grow and change over the years.**

I think that there's an untapped market out there of students. I wish that I had known more about SSSP and this division when I was a graduate student, because I would have gotten

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involved right away. But I was socialized in grad school to believe that the only conferences that mattered were ASA. So I hope that we can find ways to make SSSP grow even more and show people that you can think critically but also engage locally. And actually DO sociology. My undergraduate students get passionate about this work and want to know what they can do, and we often don't have answers to that. But this association is one of those places where you can start to have answers to those questions.

**Do you have any advice for graduate students?**

I think it helps to seek out mentors outside of your department. And if you can find them in SSSP and in this division, I think that's great. I think that if you can find faculty who are successful at their universities doing this kind of work, that's good for you to see that, that it can be done. That there's not just one path in academia. I became a full professor based on this kind of work, both as part of my teaching load and as part of my research, and I think grad students need to hear that and know that that is possible.

**Are there things that you're looking forward to in the future?**

My work centers on homelessness and the larger issue of poverty, and the larger issue to that is inequality. And currently, maybe because of the election year we are in, I think people are finally talking about the vast inequality in this country. And the homeless people we talk to, so many of them are everyday people working jobs, living paycheck to paycheck. And one crisis sends them spiralling. The car breaks down, and they don't have the ability to pay the mechanic, so they miss work and then they get fired. Or even more than that, the majority of people we talk to have experienced a health crisis with them or their family. If you watch the debates, Bernie Sanders talks about the 1% owning too much wealth, and people cheer. People are waking up to these facts, there's a push to increase the minimum wage. These conversations are finally happening.

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## Spring 2016 Student Spotlight



### **Salam Aboulhassan, Wayne State University**

Salam Aboulhassan is a current PhD student in the department of Sociology at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. A graduate teaching assistant, Salam teaches Social Problems at Wayne State and was recently awarded a departmental scholarship for outstanding Masters Thesis for her study on Arab American women in the Metro Detroit area and their perceptions of intimate partner violence.

Salam recently completed a manuscript from her thesis study, entitled: "Carrying the Burden of a Culture: Reputation, Intimate Partner Violence and Arab American Women". Her research interests include gender, socialization, and Arab American and Muslims groups in U.S. society.

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### **Can you describe your current research?**

My research concerns Arab American women, their political location within the United States, and their gendered narratives. This is part of my larger thesis work exploring Arab American women's perceptions of intimate partner violence. I interview about 20 Arab American women from a specific sample (women born to immigrant parents, who came from select Arab countries, and had grown up within two cultural narratives - US society and cultural upbringing fused with Arab culture). So the interview guide was divided up into three different areas, one on the immigration story, one on family dynamics, and the third on domestic violence. I wanted to analyze how they spoke about domestic violence, whether they framed it around Arab cultural narratives or US cultural narratives, with respect to gender. The larger study that I conducted allows me to conduct research on gender and Arab American women, with respect to social control and value structures (notions of reputation) as a way to monitor and check women's' behavior. In the face of rising islamophobia, many of the women felt that my research was making the community look bad. So this showed an attitude that personal narratives were not as important as larger community narratives that were framed around islamophobia. For many, personal conditions took a back seat to a larger image framed in the US - how they were viewed in the larger US society. Especially in Dearborn, Michigan, there's been a lot of tension and fear.

### **Let's talk a bit about methods**

The insider dilemma is definitely there, as an Arab American and Muslim woman. Confronting the insider-outsider dilemma is unique in this community. I have to constantly renegotiate my position as a researcher, to convince them both that I was a community member and that I was also an outsider so that they didn't feel like I'd talk about them inside the community (through ties to their friends and so on). The emotional work was exhausting, I had to walk away many times. I was confronted by many men within the community that were telling me that I was teaching women how to call the cops or that I was basically a sell-out to my culture. So when we think of qualitative research and personal narratives, there was definitely a uniqueness to discussing this specific marginalized group when we think of methods or access.

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### **How do you see this work fitting into the conference theme this year?**

I've always been interested in the Arab experience. I focus on Arab Americans because of my specific location, but I just feel like there are such misconceptions (and this word is not enough to describe it) about the Middle East. The cultures and experiences of these people in the Middle East differ so drastically, but the way we see them from the US gives them just one identity, based on Islam. and I think that's very concerning and it carries huge implications on a global scale. And so I think it's so important to highlight those specific communities in the Arab world and who they are. In my work, I'm just looking at the people who come from the Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Jordan). This is a very specific part of the Arab world (not the Gulf, not North Africa, etc) And even in the Levant there is so much variation. And so yes, this carries serious implications when all we're seeing in the US is the idea of "one singular" type of person who comes from the Middle East. And as time passes this oversimplification will become even more problematic. We are literally looking at a massive group of people using a single lens, based on religious identity. Americans often don't even understand the major sects within Islam, levels of religiosity, etc. But we are lumping everyone together and completely ignoring any variation that exists, not just religiously, culturally, language, dialect, way of life, patterns of marriage and education, and so on. And we fail to look at that.

And so by focusing on global issues, SSSP is helping. The Middle East is a great place to start. Even though it's constantly on the news, we don't see a lot of research on this specific area of the world. And in order to talk about anything globally, the middle east has to be included, without a doubt.

### **Has this work been an uphill battle in sociology?**

It has in a way, because this research is in its infancy. And a lot of the research that has been done, has been focused on Islamophobia and being Muslim post 9-11, political symbols, and the shaping of identity. But it's been problematic because Arab Americans have access to forms of white privilege and so they continue to remain hidden - they're not a specific minority group, so unless they're Muslim or unless they show a unique identity, they can be hidden in some ways. The only time we're talking about Arabs, we're talking about Islam or we're not

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talking at all. So there's very little space where research has been done. And most of the research on Arabs has been focused on the Arab world, and not on the experience of Arabs in the US.

I use a feminist lens, and feminism in sociology has been based on a white model. And there's a fight to go beyond that model. And it's been hard to find feminist literature that addresses these types of cultural narratives that Arab women are rooted in. So there's a disconnect. So the biggest problem in sociology is that there's been limited research on Arab American and Arab women's narratives.

**Do you have anything particular to share about this moment in the Arab-American community?**

With regard to the primaries - there were record breaking numbers in the primaries. Arab Americans tend to be swing voters, depending on candidates and foreign policy. This turnout, especially in East Dearborn was very high, and Bernie won the democratic side. This was framed by the media as just about Arabs voting for a Jewish candidate, but they were in support of his views about jobs and unions. But regardless of the reasons that Muslims voted for Bernie, this was framed only as Muslims voting for a Jewish person. This is so telling about the media's Islamophobia - that this was the only news interest.

But on the other side, Trump won the Republican vote in Dearborn,. Dearborn is only 40% Muslim/Arab. So I don't know how to explain that result, it is surprising. To some degree people seem him not only as someone who has made anti Islam comments but also someone who is a businessman.

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# SSSP CRD Member Accomplishments:

## Publications

Culton, Kenneth and José Muñoz. 2016. "Lady Gaga Meets Ritzer: Using Music to Teach Sociological Theory." *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. 3(1). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/lady-gaga-meets-ritzer-using-music-to-teach-sociological-theory/>

Halasz, Judith R. *The Bohemian Ethos: Questioning Work and Making a Scene on the Lower East Side*. Vol. 143. Routledge, 2015.

Lucero, J. L., Lim, S-j & Santiago, A.M. (2016) "Changes in Economic Hardship and Intimate Partner Violence: A Family Stress Framework." *Journal of Family Economic Issues*. 37(2).

Muñoz, José and Kenneth Culton. 2016. "Blogs, Tweets, and Protests: Learning Movement Theory through Online Case-Studies." *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. 28(1).

Rodgers, Diane M., Jessica Petersen, and Jill Sanderson. "Commemorating alternative organizations and marginalized spaces: The case of forgotten Finntowns." *Organization* 23.1 (2016): 90-113.