

## STATEMENT OF RESEARCH AND INTELLECTUAL ORIENTATION

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The foundation on which my scholarship and intellectual orientation is built focuses on the importance of diverse methodological and theoretical aspects of social research. My doctoral area examinations exemplify the importance of both theory and methods to my scholarship. I successfully sat for my first examination in social research methods by demonstrating my knowledge and work in quantitative and qualitative research designs and their application; the sociology and philosophy of knowledge; and within my focus area of time-dependent and multi-level quantitative models. Secondly, I passed a comprehensive examination in social theory by focusing on the exposition and application of classical social theory and the breadth of contemporary micro- and macro-social theory, including symbolic interactionism, power and social control, and theories of gender, race, and class difference. My specialized theoretical area explored political sociology and stratification theories, especially political economy and state theory, social development, public policy, and welfare states. Both my grounding in multiple methods and an appreciation for working in different theoretical domains on inequality and stratification underscores my current and future research.

### *Current Research Agenda and Future Research Interests*

Broadly, my research interests and overall agenda focus on the exploration of, and relationships between, social problems at different micro- and macro-levels. I currently focus on social policies and programs as state responses to social and economic problems. By considering the depth and breadth of provisions, including funding and eligibility, I am interested in how individuals and social groups – both as targets of, and exclusions from, these policies – experience their daily life. Topically, I focus on issues of poverty and inequality, political economy, social welfare, and their manifestation through interconnected social institutions. My interests in the historical conditions of social groups and networks – especially families, low-wage workers, welfare recipients, children, as well as contrasting these conditions with those of politicians and elites – can be explored at a micro-level, while connecting their experiences with historical social trends and conditions of existence.

My dissertation research focuses directly on the historical importance of the family as a social institution, especially the growing poverty and inequality of families within the United States and the use of, changes in, and access to social welfare policies adjacent to the political economy. Based on a macro-economic conceptualization of the family as both a reproductive and consumptive institution, I use the current economic recession to examine how the family in the post-WWII United States shifts from an entity supported for its primary reproductive and socialization roles, to its importance as a fundamentally consumptive institution. Using multiple research methods including qualitative institutional analyses and quantitative time-series models of social change, I examine the historically contingent relationship between the family, economy, and the state, to trace the deterioration of the economic condition of families in exchange for

neoliberal political and economic stability. This research not only utilizes my scholarship in social theory, especially political sociology, welfare state theory, and political economy, but also is an example of how I incorporate multiple-methods in my work.

My dissertation research, being both quantitatively and qualitatively historical is intellectually fulfilling and both the topic and multiple-method modality will remain a focus of my research agenda in the future. I find much enjoyment in researching these issues and put them at the top of my research agenda for the next three to five years. Further, working within the economic and social conditions of the family, as well as the sociology of poverty, I focus on timely and important subjects given the on-going economic problems within the United States and around the world. Combined with the quantitative and qualitative nature of my work, and the multiple levels of relationships between phenomena and theories, I am confident that my agenda, being intellectually relevant, will be a substantial contribution to the literature.

Other issues, however, that I would like to consider in future research are tangential to the social problems of poverty and the experiences of families. Generally, I am interested in focusing my research into cases concentrated on the deterioration of urban areas leading up to and as an outcome of the current economic recession. For example, Midwestern, Rust Belt cities, such as Detroit, Michigan and Gary, Indiana, once middle class areas grounded in important manufacturing industries, exemplify the need to focus on broad and significant economic and political issues and their historically contingent impact on the private troubles of a large segment of the population. Topically, I am interested in the mounting disparities within a stratified social system that, for example, manifest in divergent health outcomes such as childhood obesity, and the racial, ethnic, and class inequalities in education and access to social services.

#### *Other Research Experience*

In addition to my dissertation and related future research interests, I have other on-going research projects. First, working with my advisor, Susan Carlson, and collaborator Ray Michalowski of Northern Arizona University, we compare changes within the post-WWII United States political economy and the criminal justice system. We argue, specifically, that a significant shift from a placative to a repressive penal system of social control is concomitant shifts in economic growth and decay in the post-war economy. This analysis will be published in a forth-coming book chapter publish by Cambridge University Press. Additionally, Dr. Carlson, Dr. Michalowski and I expand on the book chapter to explore the balance of federal welfare and criminal justice policies as mechanisms of social control during economic expansion and contraction. By intersecting economic indicators of capital accumulation with welfare and criminal justice expenditures, we argue that the government uses assistance programs and rehabilitative procedures to placate marginal populations when labor markets are tight, but when unemployment is low and jobs are available social support is withdrawn and programs become repressive. Currently, we are updating this research and revising a manuscript to submit for publication.

Second, I am also participating in a collaborative project with colleagues at Western Michigan University, led by Dr. Carlson, to compile a volume of research comparing social control mechanisms in seven capitalist countries after World War II. Through criminal justice,

social welfare, labor, and immigration policies, the collaboration contrasts the similarities and divergences of social control across these countries in relation to local and global economic growth and political economy. The goal of the overall project is to track shifts in capitalist states and their convergence on legislative actions to support economic growth and control surplus populations. Within my work for the volume, I co-author a chapter examining the changing relationship between economic, political, and labor conditions in the United States and am contributing a lone-authored chapter that makes similar comparisons within post-war Japan.

Third, I have worked over the past several years to develop a line of research that focuses on the poverty of lone-mother families. Most notably, in a qualitative project, I probe public statements regarding social insurance and welfare policies given by U.S. Presidents. Specifically, I compare these public statements at historical moments when welfare policy, as a public law, is enacted or amended and argue that these statements frame how the poor generally, and welfare-mothers particularly, should be viewed as deserving or undeserving in light of the policy provisions. In the end, I posit that such statements offer the discursively produced knowledge and truth about certain people as a mechanism of governmentality. I expect to submit this article for review in the Fall of 2009. In addition, I have conducted a historical and comparative project between Japan and the United States and the convergence of welfare policies for lone-mother families toward welfare-to-work style provisions. From this comparative project, I conducted an in-depth analysis focusing on lone-mother families in the United States and the contradictions between reproductive and labor expectations of poor women with children in the period after World War II.

One line of my past research has focused on other social institutions and social welfare interventions through applied methods. I have considerable experience in applied social research evaluating child abuse and neglect prevention programs for the State of Michigan. As the owner and lead consultant of a research firm, I worked closely with Michigan's Department of Human Services to evaluate both state- and federally-funded programs. More specifically, I developed a model of program evaluation that was implemented state-wide, and that incorporated both state and federal mandates while being flexible enough to capture the intricacies of the programs as they were provided on a county- or city/township-level. In my experience with these programs, I wrote, or co-wrote numerous legislative and public reports outlining the progress toward program outcomes and indicators. Additionally, I researched, developed, and presented numerous evaluation training workshops for private and public agencies throughout Michigan, as well as for professional conferences. I also provided testimony to subcommittees within the State of Michigan Legislature and research presentations to executive and publicly-appointed interagency oversight committees of these programs.

### *Contributions and Philosophy*

Several themes resound within my research that exemplifies the contribution of my work. First, whether it is the development of social programs or the conditions of existence of their recipients, I provide context for and arguments of the historically contingent relationships between social institutions and the lived experiences of different social groups. Second, by combining various dimensions of a social problem, I provide different, but complimentary lenses through which social problems may be considered. Lastly, and most important, social phenomena do not have a single cause-and-effect relationship within some domain. It is my

hope that a major contribution of my work provides justification for using various methods and theories – that is, tools – to understand the complexity of the social world.

Through these themes, the essence of my research philosophy and the agenda on which I am currently working and planning future projects can best be described in a closing thought from C. Wright Mills<sup>1</sup>. Research, he writes, is not a close-ended process for single study; it is a way of life. One's research agenda is the continuity and disjunctures of repeatedly asking and answer questions of social phenomena. Through my statement of research and my intellectual orientation, it is my goal to contribute to the literature much like Mills conceptualizes scholarship as a craft:

*“The classical crafts[person] does not usually make up one big design for one big empirical study. [One's] policy is to allow and to invite a continual shuttle between macroscopic conceptions and detailed expositions. [One] does this by designing [their] work as a series of smaller-scale empirical studies (which may of course include microscopic and statistical work), each of which seems to be pivotal to some part or another of the solution [s]he is elaborating. That solution is confirmed modified, or refuted, according to the results of these empirical studies (p. 126).*

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<sup>1</sup> Mills, C. W. (1959). *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.