

21st Annual Symposium on Family Issues

October 7-8, 2013

Penn State University

Diverging Destinies: Families in an Era of Increasing Inequality

In a provocative article published in 2004, Sara McLanahan described the diverging destinies of American families and children. She noted that women were following two trajectories, one involving delays in childrearing and increases in employment, and the other involving high levels of divorce and non-marital childbearing. Women with the most opportunities were following the first trajectory, whereas women with the fewest opportunities were following the second. Consequently, changes in family demographics were exacerbating social class disparities in children's access to resources.

The diverging destinies of children have been unfolding within the context of three decades of growing economic inequality in the U.S. Moreover, the Great Recession, which began in December 2007, increased economic hardship for millions of families. Although it ended officially in June 2009, rates of child poverty and unemployment, particularly among young adults, remain higher today than they had been a few years earlier.

This symposium will address how children, young adults, parents, and families are faring in an era of increasing social inequality. The sessions will focus on social class differences in family demographic trends, the consequences of growing inequality for parenting and child development, the consequences of growing inequality for the transition to adulthood, and effective program and policy responses to address these problems.

Monday, October 7, 2013 – Nittany Lion Inn Ballroom

9:00am - 12 noon: Diverging Destinies for American Children

This session will update our understanding of the diverging destinies thesis. To what extent are women and men with different levels of social and economic resources following different trajectories of marriage, divorce, employment, and non-marital births? What causes underlie these trends? What are the implications of these trajectories for children's access to parental resources?

Lead Speaker: Sara McLanahan, Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Princeton University, and Wade Jacobsen, Department of Sociology and Crime, Law, & Justice, Penn State

Discussants:

- Philip Cohen, Department of Sociology, University of Maryland

- Lynne Vernon-Feagans and Margaret R. Burchinal, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (co-author not attending)
- Tim Smeeding, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison

1:30 – 4:30 pm: Social Inequality, Parenting, and Child Development

Researchers have recognized for many years that economic hardship creates challenges for parents and is linked with problems in children's adjustment, development, and well-being. This session will explore the implications of growing social and economic inequality for parents, parenting, and child outcomes.

Lead Speaker: Ariel Kalil, Harris School of Public Policy Studies, The University of Chicago

Discussants:

- Flavio Cunha, Department of Economics, University of Pennsylvania
- Martha Wadsworth, Department of Psychology, Penn State
- Narayan Sastry, Population Studies Center, University of Michigan

Tuesday, October 8, 2013

8:30 – 11:30 am: Social Inequality and the Transition to Adulthood

The transition to adulthood has become more complex in recent decades, with pathways becoming more diverse and less predictable. This session will explore the implications of increasing social and economic inequality for young people's adoption of adult roles, including employment, union formation, and childbearing.

Lead Speaker: Ingrid Schoon, Institute of Education, University of London

Discussants:

- Jeremy Staff and Nayan Ramirez, Department of Sociology and Crime, Law, & Justice, Penn State
- Brad Wilcox, National Marriage Project, University of Virginia
- Matthew Diemer, Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology & Special Education, Michigan State University

1:00 – 4:00 pm: Program and Policy Responses to Growing Family Inequality

Demographic and economic trends are increasing social class disparities in children's access to resources and the likelihood of making successful transitions to adult roles and responsibilities. What have been the most effective programs and policies for reducing disparities? Given these trends, what roles should government and other institutions play

to ensure that all children have access to resources that facilitate development and all youth have opportunities to become productive, socially responsible adults?

Lead Speaker: Ron Haskins, Center on Children and Families, Brookings Institution

Discussants:

- Cybele Raver and Amanda Leigh Roy, Department of Applied Psychology, New York University
- Sheldon Danziger, Russell Sage Foundation
- Kathryn Edin, Public Policy and Management, Harvard Kennedy School