

The FPH Chronicle

THE OFFICIAL ANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE FAMILY AND POPULATION HEALTH LABORATORY

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A Message from the Lab Director



Greetings! Welcome to our Fall 2022 newsletter!

This marks another productive year for our lab members! Exciting things are happening within our group. Our faculty members have been busy with a variety of projects, including NIH-funded research. Our students have been highly engaged in learning and collaborating on those projects. This year, we look forward to holding regular meetings and also the continuation of our lecture series, which will culminate in our flagship event, The 8th Annual Medicine, Health, and Society Seminar, scheduled to take place in the Spring of 2023.

Amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the various manifestations of disruption around us, contributors within our group continue to provide one another with support, connection, and a sense of community. In this newsletter, we highlight some of the major accomplishments of current FPH members over the past year. Please enjoy and share it widely within your professional networks!

Looking to the future!

Hui (Cathy) Liu
FPH Director and Professor of Sociology



The FPH Lab is Accepting New Members

The Family and Population Health Laboratory is a space wherein students and faculty work in partnership in the analysis of population-level data. While some of the core themes of our research are sociological in nature, we are an interdisciplinary organization. The FPH lab is currently admitting students and faculty who are interested in exploring such social phenomena as mental, physical and cognitive health; family; gender and sexuality; social networks; health disparities; and aging and the life course. If you are interested in any topics related to the above areas and would enjoy collaborating with like-minded scholars, we invite you to reach out to us. For more information on joining FPH, please contact lab director Dr. Hui Liu at liuhu@msu.edu.

Visit our website at
<https://sociology.msu.edu/research/liu-research.html>

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sexual and Gender Minority Health researcher Philip Pettis joins MSU Sociology as a tenure-track Assistant Professor



We are proud to congratulate “PJ” Pettis on their new appointment. When asked for comment, PJ remarked, “I am excited to join a community of scholars doing innovative and incredible work. I look forward to contributing to the robust scholarly community by centering research on the intersectional experiences of sexual minorities. I am also very much looking forward to living and settling in Michigan. It is a beautiful state with a vibrant history and culture.”

Recent MSU Psychology PHD grad Jeewon Oh joins Department of Psychology at Syracuse University as an Assistant Professor



It is with great excitement that we extend our best wishes and congratulations to Jeewon for her exciting new career advancement. Said her mentor, Dr. William Chopik, of Jeewon’s new job, “When I think about Jeewon as a person, I’m proud of how wonderful she treats other people and builds people up and sees them for what they can be. I’m excited to see Jeewon start at Syracuse and I’m sure she’ll bring her characteristic positive energy to her students and colleagues there!”

Hannah Pierson hired as Dr. Molly Copeland’s Research Assistant for the 2022-2023 academic year



Sociology graduate student Hannah Pierson will be embarking upon a new career opportunity this year and hopes to advance her research agenda in the process. When remarking on earning a research assistantship with Dr. Copeland, Hannah expressed much enthusiasm for her new faculty advisor. Said the second-year PhD student of her new appointment, “I am excited to be working with Dr. Copeland on a project that intersects both of our interests. [Together we will collaborate] on a project involving social networks and cognitive health. Further, working with Dr. Copeland as my chair has been amazing, as we work together very well and they are entirely supportive. I am also taking an independent study with her this semester covering social networks, as it is a topic that I am excited to learn more about and Dr. Copeland has expertise on.”

FACULTY FOCUS:

A Few Questions with **Molly Copeland** (Assistant Professor – Department of Sociology) and **Zhenmei Zhang** (Professor – Department of Sociology)



Question: Can you discuss your experiences that pertain to collaborating with students? Specifically, how has mentorship impacted your professional lives and the careers of your students?

ZZ: *I have had the good fortune of mentoring multiple talented graduate students since I came to MSU in 2006. These students have brought me so much joy and pride. I treasure the time we have spent together figuring out data issues, writing manuscripts, and chatting and laughing. I have kept in touch with all of them after they graduated. My first research assistant, Dr. Chuntian Lu, is now a professor and chair of the Department of Sociology at a prestigious Chinese university.*

Most of my mentees have worked as my research assistants on NIH-funded projects. Without them, I would not be so productive. They are my fabulous collaborators. I have also learned a lot from my mentees when they worked on their second-year papers and dissertations. Their research topics broadened the horizon of my research areas. It is very rewarding to be a mentor.

MC: *Being a relatively new professor (and probably having started during the pandemic) means I have few collaborations with students so far. At MSU, I'm on a couple of PhD committees, and for research, I've been lucky to work with Cathy, Gerald, and colleagues in other departments on the Social Ties & COVID research projects and on a new project with Hannah (whose committee is the first I'm chairing) and Cathy on Social Networks & Cognition. I'm excited to see the publications and eventual job placements that stem from these projects.*

As to philosophy, I think mentorship is an important way to get training, but also that PhD life can be challenging, as a grad student and even as a professor: we often work in isolation, we grapple with questions that don't have clear answers, and we face frequent rejection, so developing relationships helps us support each other as we do science. I think this means it's important to have many mentors who can meet different needs for support and training, so constructing your own mentoring village is helpful, both for doing the type of science you want to do and for staying sane! I also think we sometimes think about mentoring as only vertical relationships, but more horizontal ones, like collabs between grad students at different years in the program, can be very supportive and helpful for learning the nuts and bolts of how to actually do things not taught in classes, like submitting to a journal or starting a lit review search.

Question: Why have you chosen to conduct research in your respective areas?

ZZ: *That's a good question. I guess I am mainly interested in medical sociology because my mother had a lot of health issues during my childhood. I still remember every day when I went home from school, a strong smell of Chinese medicine usually greeted me. She had hoped that I could be a doctor. When I entered graduate school, I felt attracted to the study of social determinants of health because it helped me understand why diseases are not distributed randomly in society. One of my favorite books at that time was Durkheim's Suicide, and it really opened my eyes to the power of the sociological study of health and well-being.*

My current research interest in dementia was developed after I attended a Rand Summer Institute in 2004. At that time, I just received my Ph.D. degree from Penn State and was an assistant professor at Bowling Green State University. Several invited speakers at the Summer Institute were experts on Alzheimer's disease. I was struck by the cruelty of this disease and the devastation it had on patients, their families, and society. I also felt that it was an area that had great promise for young scholars like me because there was an urgent need to understand the risk factors of the disease. Since then, several of my grant proposals on dementia have been funded by the NIH, and the funding has helped me greatly in training our graduate students, having protected time for research, and establishing myself as an expert on health disparities in dementia.

MC: *I've always been interested in topics where there's an underlying pattern that's like a hidden map of what seems like a very typical process. When I first saw social network analysis as an undergrad (as a linguistics major who'd stumbled into a Soc class), where you can literally draw out the web of social relationships for a person or setting, and then describe ways that this web affects health, it was fascinating! I was too broke and burnt out after undergrad to head straight into grad school, but as I was working as a high school teacher (not a cure for burn out, turns out), I still thought about those webs of connections. When I was ready for grad school, I was curious about how those patterns help or hurt adolescents' success, which lead me to a Soc PhD. As I studied networks and health as a grad student, I felt like we knew a lot about networks affecting more tangible aspects of health (like "peer pressure" to smoke), so I wondered if social relationships also affect less obviously 'contagious' factors, like mental health. Then I learned about the life course perspective, that what we experience when we're teens can have a lasting impact so that this hidden map of networks when you're an adolescent can actually tell us about your health for decades to come – that's too good a puzzle not to study!*

Being a professor is an awesome job because it gives me the freedom to study puzzles like this from many different directions and to follow wherever the next research question leads. I also get to geek out about the power of these hidden patterns in the classes I teach (and I've always loved teaching, but it's even more fun when you don't have to call parents or monitor detention like when teaching high school). It's exciting and rewarding to get to help students discover or better articulate how these different hidden social patterns shape the world around us.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:

A Chat with Second Year Sociology PhD Students **Hannah Pierson** and **Sam Safford**



Question: Each of you were in the 2021-2022 Sociology Cohort. Can you tell me about your experiences in the last year?

HP: *My first year as a doctoral student was unique in that I had a lot of health issues related to personal problems but also due to COVID-19 concerns as well as being a first-generation college student. However, the people I have met and made connections with have been invaluable. The mentorship program has allowed me to foster great connections and work together to further our successes. I have great experiences with all of the professors within our department, they are so understanding and helpful. Dr. Copeland is my chair of my committee and has been an amazing mentor and supportive in ways that are just more than I expected. The same can be said for Dr. Liu, Dr. Zhang, Dr. Nsieh, Dr. Prior, Dr. Ayala, and Dr. Broman as they have been indispensable for my success as a doctoral student. The lab has been essential for me to help ensure that we connect especially as it has been harder to do so when I transferred to remote learning.*

SS: *The first two words that come to mind when reflecting on my first year in the doctoral program are “challenging” and “rewarding.” I came to Michigan State knowing that I would face a number of obstacles, including switching disciplines, entering a prestigious program, and wanting to prove that I deserved the opportunity, and moving across country to a state I’d never visited and away from my friends and family, all during a major pandemic. While all of these factored into how well I fared my first year, it was the rigorous expectations set by my professors, advisors, and peers that proved to be the biggest challenge. Meeting them all was the first step towards the feeling of accomplishment that I came away with after turning in my final paper this spring. It was an arduous journey to get through, but it was more rewarding than I could have ever imagined.*

Question: You both have well-established research interests. Why did you choose these areas? How do you hope that your research will impact stakeholders?

HP: *My area of interest is in reproductive health care disparities, mainly racial and ethnic inequalities. I would say that this area chose me more so, as once I started noticing the disparities it was far too hard to ignore as there was not much being done about it in the United States. Considering the current state of our nation, with Roe v. Wade overturned and the continued policing of reproductive health care I think this particular area is more important than ever before, as rates of maternal and infant mortality are still rising and with the change in the laws it could have potential to get even worse.*

SS: *As with many other queer academics, my research agenda has been molded in large part by my own experiences navigating life as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. In addition to facing discrimination when seeking out healthcare, I have constantly had to validate my gender and sexuality to strangers seeking to label me as invalid. Both of these types of encounters, of which I have had far more than I can count on one hand, led me to wonder why LGBTQ+ individuals face such adversity compared to many of their other peers.*

During my training as an economist, I first began studying inequalities in health among sexual minority individuals. And while this set me up to easily transition to the field of medical sociology, coming out as trans and facing even more barriers continually erected by society directed me towards specifically examining how transgender Americans are both discriminated against in healthcare as well as how they seek to navigate and cope with said discrimination.

FPH ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2021-2022

Cliff Broman was named Faculty of the Month by the MSU Honors College.

Bill Chopik won the Richard Kalish Innovative Publication Award, awarded by GSA.

Bill Chopik won the Faculty Research Award, awarded by Michigan State University 2022

Ning Hsieh was promoted to associate professor with tenure.

Ning Hsieh received a 2022 MSU Teacher-Scholar Award.

PhD student Zoey Lai was the 2022 recipient of the Kenneth E. Corey Research Enrichment Fund, awarded by the College of Social Science.

Hui Liu was awarded the 2021 IPUMS Research Award for best published health surveys research.

Hui Liu was selected to serve as a standing member of the NIH Social Sciences and Population Studies B (SSPB) Study Section (2022-2026).

stef shuster won a 2022 Michigan State University Teacher-Scholar Award.

stef shuster received the 2021 Donald W. Light Award for applied medical sociology from the American Sociological Association Medical Sociology section.

stef shuster won the GenCen Professional Achievement Award for their work in gender equity and social justice.

FPH PUBLICATIONS

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Wong, Jaclyn S., and **Ning Hsieh**. 2021. “Couple Analysis in the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project.” *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 76(Supplement_3):S276–86.

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Liu, Hui, **Molly Copeland**, **Gerald R. Nowak III**, **William J. Chopik**, and **Jeewon Oh**. Forthcoming. “Marital Status Differences in Loneliness among Older Americans during the COVID-19 Pandemic”. *Population Research and*

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Liu, Hui and Rin Reczek. 2021. “Birth Cohort Trends in Health Disparities by Sexual Orientation.” *Demography*. 58(4):1445-1472.

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Online First. “Reducing the Joy Deficit in Sociology: A Study of Transgender Joy.” *Social Problems*.

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