

Our graduate student for the Spring 2015 Children and Youth newsletter's "Meet the Graduate Student Interview" is Ellyn Arevalo Steidl. Ellyn received her B.A. in Sociology/Anthropology from St. Olaf College in 2010. Currently, she is a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin. She is an NICHD Predoctoral Trainee and a Graduate Student Trainee at UT's Population Research Center. She also is an editorial assistant for *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Ellyn's research interests generally focus on marriage and close relationships, with an emphasis on relationship transitions and formation behaviors.

Ann Beutel (CY Publications Committee Member) asked Ellyn the following questions.

**Ann: How did you become interested in studying youth? What are the youth-related aspects of your research?**

**Emir:** I became interested in studying youth through a hands-on research opportunity I had as an undergraduate at St. Olaf College. For one of my sociology courses, students were asked to design and carry out a research project, including everything from survey development and data analysis, to writing up results and presenting at the Midwest Sociological Society Conference. My group decided to study young adults' first intercourse experiences during the transition to adulthood. Not only did I find the process of research fascinating, but I realized I wanted to learn more about how people navigated relationships during this life stage.

In graduate school this interest has focused on how cultural norms, social institutions, and occupational experiences shape young adults' familial and romantic relationships, with resulting implications for health and well-being. Two of my current projects examine how young adults respond to and are shaped by areas of uncertainty in their life. For example, in one collaborative project with Dr. Shannon Cavanagh (University of Texas) and Dr. Monica Johnson (Washington State University), I'm using the Minnesota Youth Development Study to research how adolescents' uncertainty about their occupational aspirations shapes their transitions into cohabitation and marriage in adulthood. And then for my master's thesis, I conducted in-depth interviews to examine how young adults encounter uncertainty in the young adult dating scene, and how this ambiguity shapes gender roles during relationship formation.

**Ann: You are a member of the Children and Youth section. As a graduate student, what are some of the benefits of belonging to the CY section?**

**Ellyn:** My favorite part about being a member of the Children and Youth section is the opportunity it has given me to meet other sociologists who have intersecting research interests, and to become familiar with their work. And because of the diversity of youth-related research interests represented in this section, membership in the CY section has helped me discover more publications than I otherwise would. This has proved fruitful for the development of the questions I ask in my own research.

**Ann: Are there new things the section could do to help its graduate student members?**

**Emir:** One thing I notice is how valuable individual mentoring is in graduate school. Taking time to learn from faculty not only how to approach a research project, but also how to develop core skills in other areas like collaboration, grant writing, and balancing responsibilities has helped me develop professionally as a graduate student. I think it is very valuable for graduate students to hear from diverse voices on these matters, so I would love to see the CY section create space for both junior and tenured faculty to give professional and career advice to graduate student members.

**Ann: What advice do you have for other graduate students?**

**Ellyn:** My piece of advice for other graduate students is to never lose touch with the populations you study in your scholarly work, as this keeps your work grounded and relevant, and makes it more likely that you will ask the right questions in your research. Several professors have shared this perspective with me, and this has helped me navigate decisions of both what to study and how to approach it. Any scholar's work can run the risk of becoming abstract if we only experience what we study through journal articles and books. Conversations, friendships, and other relationships with people who experience what you're studying is always a good thing.

**Ann: What projects are you looking forward to working on in the future?**

**Ellyn:** A newer strain of my research engages how young adult women's occupational characteristics matter for infant health. Pregnant women who work throughout their pregnancy face additional implications from occupational stress. Recent research has shown that some work characteristics that are commonly understood as resources, such as job authority and responsibility, can fail to provide a health advantage to women (Pudrovska 2013, Pudrovska and Karraker 2014), but it is unclear what this means for birth outcomes. Given that low birth weight is the most salient predictor of infant mortality, and is linked to an increased risk of developmental disabilities, I think it is important to understand how occupational experiences can affect the well-being of the next generation. To that end I'm using the NLSY'97 to study how occupational characteristics associated with authority affect pregnant women's risk of having a low birth-weight infant.

**Ann: Do you have any hobbies or other interests that you would like to share with the CY newsletter readers?**

**Ellyn:** Outside of graduate school I love catching different musical and performing art productions around town with my family and friends. Austin is a good city for this! I enjoy everything from singer-songwriter shows at the University of Texas's Cactus Café, to productions by Austin Ballet, to Austin's annual outdoor summer musical.