

reflected appraisals

We perceive ourselves as others perceive us

by amy johnson conner and ryan alaniz

chores soc shows what every woman knows

Men have nearly doubled the number of hours they devote to housework since the 1970s, but women are still doing far more.

The sociologist-driven Council on Contemporary Families garnered significant media attention in April when it released a report telling women what they already know and men what they think is bunk: Women do more around the house.

Women on average spend 19 hours each week cooking, cleaning, shopping, and doing other family work; men spend 10 hours doing such things, according to the report by sociologists Oriell Sullivan of Ben Gurion University and Scott Coltrane of the University of California Riverside.

But they also point out that “American couples have made remarkable progress in working out mutually satisfying arrangements to share the responsibilities of breadwinning and family care. And polls continue to show increasing approval of such arrangements.”

The council calls on employers to do more to accommodate their workers’ wants and needs for their lives outside the office, noting that America’s work policies and social support systems for working parents are among the worst in the world.

armchair soc we got the man in white

The *New York Times* Reading Room blog discovered during an interview that novelist Tom Wolfe is something of an amateur sociologist, according to an OrgTheory post by blogger Brayden King.

Sam Tanenhaus, of *The New York Times*, listened as Wolfe admitted to falling in love with sociology and that during graduate school he became attracted to Max Weber’s theorizing of status.

That concept, of course, figures prominently in Wolfe’s most popular novels, especially *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, which along with *The Right Stuff* is being reissued in paperback.



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myth-busting jihadists don’t need smarts

Engineers—overrepresented among jihadists—may be recruited not for their technical proficiency but rather for their personality type, *The (London) Independent* reported in an interview with University of Oxford sociologist Diego Gambetta.

Gambetta and colleague Steffen Hertog have found no evidence engineers are recruited for their smarts, as one might think. Rather, they’re of the mind that “certain social conditions affect engineers more than other graduates.” There are certain traits that attract people to Islam that are also found among engineers slightly more often than among other graduates, he told the paper.

“Piecemeal evidence suggests that traits such as a greater lack of tolerance of ambiguity, a belief that society can be made to work like a clock, and a dislike of democratic politics, are more frequent among engineers,” Gambetta said.

protests times are a-changin’

Protests today just may not be what they were in the 1960s.

In a recent interview with NPR’s popular news show the *Bryant Park Project*, Columbia University sociology professor Dana Fisher spoke at length about the state of protest in the United States today.

“What galvanized people to march on Washington was the sense that people’s lives would be affected,” she said of the 1960s. “Young people took to the streets in droves because they were

afraid they'd be shipped off to Vietnam."

But the life-and-death issues we face today aren't here at home—they're abroad, she continued. So people come out for a day and then go back home to their lives. And that's no way to affect a social movement.

"You need people to go home and continue to show their dissatisfaction. They need to make it clear they're not going to take it any more. They need to show politicians that change is required," she said.

venkatesh this guy's everywhere

Illustration © Antony Hare



Every time we turn around these days Sudhir Venkatesh is featured somewhere (NPR, *The Colbert Report*, *The Times of India*, *Chronicle of Philanthropy*) for something (slumming with gang bangers, the economics of high-end prostitution, helping a rich kid donate \$70 million).

Director of the Center for Urban Research and Policy at Columbia University and a self-proclaimed "rogue sociologist," Venkatesh published his third book, *Gang Leader For a Day*, this year. It brought him back to the public stage after the success of *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor* and the introduction the world received to his work in the pages of *New York Times* bestseller *Freakonomics*.

Venkatesh, who arguably is becoming the public face of sociology, writes

ethnographic accounts of situations that may be geographically only miles away but are dramatically removed from the world most Americans know.

[You can watch Steven Colbert interview Venkatesh and listen to a recent interview he gave on NPR at Contexts' daily sociology news blog, the Contexts Crawler, contexts.org/crawler/.]

social networks friends could make us healthier

Based on the results of fascinating new studies about how those close to us influence our behavior, it may be possible to use our social networks to make us healthier, according to a report in *The Washington Post*.

A number of studies—sociological and otherwise—are fueling a growing recognition that many of our behaviors are swayed by our friends and relatives in ways we don't completely understand.

Most recently, Harvard University medical sociologist Nicholas A. Christakis and University of California San Diego political scientist James H. Fowler studied more than 12,000 people who took part in the Framingham Heart Study, named for the Boston suburb with which most participants had some kind of connection.

Last year they found that obesity spreads among our groups like a virus or a fad, and this spring the two announced that smokers have a better chance of quitting if someone close to them did so successfully, the *Post* reported.

Problem is, though, when the remaining smokers are left out of groups where smoking has become unacceptable, they're pushed farther to the fringe and they lose their connections with

others. The same could hold true for obesity.

Which means that if we use policies like these in an attempt to make people healthier, it could stigmatize—and hurt—they even more.

Columbia University sociologist Duncan Watts pointed out in the article that public policy treats people like "atomized individuals," but these studies demonstrate what we're missing when that's the only way we think.

open nests turns out you can go home again

Wall Street Journal Work & Family columnist Sue Shellenbarger reported on sociology and economics studies heralding the new era of the open nest.

In increasing numbers (34 percent), young adults are moving back in with their parents during their 20s, and their parents are welcoming them with open arms.

Many parents who felt pressed for time while their kids were young welcome the chance to have a few more years before giving them up again, Princeton University sociologist Katherine Newman told the paper.

Both parties report they're satisfied with the arrangement, although they admit they do get on each other's nerves from time to time, Newman said. The hope is the stigma associated with moving back home will fade, thus reducing the psychological toll that living with Mom and Dad takes on young adults, she said.