



Center for Human Environments

Annual Report: July 1, 2006 - June 30, 2007

Professor Susan Saegert, Director

CENTER FOR HUMAN ENVIRONMENTS

ANNUAL REPORT 2006-2007

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Executive Summary

The **Center for Human Environments (CHE)** operates as a consortium of individual research groups, representing the major areas of expertise and interest of its Graduate Center faculty affiliates: the **Children's Environments Research Group**, the **Housing Environments Research Group**, the **Public Space Research Group**, **Youth Studies Research Group**, and the newly formed **Health & Society Research Group**. CHE also partners with **ActKnowledge**, an organization based at the Graduate Center that works with community groups, not-for-profits, foundations, and government agencies to evaluate and improve their programs and policies.

During the past year CHE has focused special attention on developing its capacity in health research by organizing the **Health & Society Research Group**. This new group will draw on researchers at the Graduate Center, but will also seek collaborators at other CUNY campuses.

Professor Tracey A. Revenson, a noted health psychologist and long-time affiliate of CHE, will assume the role of Acting Director for the fall of 2007, while Professor Susan Saegert is on leave. A member of the Social-Personality Psychology faculty at the Graduate Center, Prof. Revenson also has appointments in Developmental, Women's Studies and the Health Concentration. She currently has two NIH grants in the area of cancer survivorship and a PSC-CUNY grant to study pain and arthritis.

CHE faculty and affiliates are active in submitting grant applications for federal support and to private foundations. In 2006-2007, CHE housed 30 active grants (6 of them federally funded) with a combined value of \$1,178,120. In this era of budget-tightening among federal agencies, this is a remarkable "hit" rate among CHE investigators. In addition, CHE administers Business Office accounts that received nearly \$60,000 in gifts during the past year. And it is also important to note that CHE researchers as a group continue to invest major effort in submitting new grant proposals to federal agencies (NIH, DOE, NSF).

In the coming year, CHE plans to encourage increased grant submission by holding grant-writing workshops for investigators and by making its website more accessible and useful to both CHE researchers and to potential sponsors.

A. ACTIVITIES

Children's Environments Research Group (CERG)

Director: Professor Roger Hart

In 2006-2007, Professor Roger Hart was awarded a CUNY Collaborative grant to study the everyday lives of young children in relation to their environment in the U.S., Colombia, S.A., and India. This project is a joint effort with Prof. Elizabeth Matthews at Hunter College and Prof. David Kritt at the College of Staten Island. Professor Hart is also continuing his National Science Foundation-funded work on the "changing geography of childhood," an examination of how free time and play activities of children in a Vermont town have evolved over the past three decades. As this NSF project enters its third and final year, Prof. Hart is giving special attention to video as a means to record and study his participants' views.

One highlight of the year for **CERG** and its Director came when they received attention in a front-page article in *The New York Times* (Jan. 10, 2007) for their consulting role in the development of a new type of playground designed to engage children in complex collaborative play.

As in the past, **CERG** continues to benefit from its ongoing relationship with Graduate Center alumni. For example, Co-Director Selim Iltus (Ph.D. in Psychology, 1994) has worked recently on UN projects concerning children in Africa and Central Asia (The Sudan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan) and regularly shares his experiences and expertise with Graduate Center faculty and students. And in the past year Caitlin Cahill (Ph.D. in Psychology, 2005) has participated in editing the journal *Children, Youth and Environments*, founded by **CERG** at the Graduate Center, now published by the University of Colorado.

Housing Environments Research Group (HERG)

Director: Professor Susan Saegert

In 2006-2007, **HERG** concluded its multi-year study of homeownership education services. This research originated in 2004, when the NeighborWorks America, a nonprofit created by Congress, awarded **HERG** a grant to conduct a survey of clients receiving homeownership education from its national network of counseling agencies. In subsequent years, the original sponsor was joined by Freddie Mac, the federally-chartered agency charged with stabilizing home mortgage markets, by a housing research and development foundation (Heron), and by numerous mortgage lenders. The **HERG** project team conducted focus groups in five representative areas (Texas, Georgia, Ohio, Missouri, and NYC) to understand the barriers that prevent low- and moderate-income home buyers from taking greater advantage of post-purchase counseling and support services. The title of the research group's final report, *Understanding Responses to the Threat of Foreclosure among Low-Income Homeowners*, testifies to its orientation toward the consumer's viewpoint in mortgage lending, a perspective frequently missing from discussions of the current foreclosure crisis in the US. This report is now being circulated among nonprofits, the mortgage lending community, and policy makers.

Rising foreclosure rates and how they affect low- and moderate-income homeowners and their

neighborhoods were also the topic of concern for a **HERG** project begun in 2007 on behalf of the New York-based Parodneck Foundation. Contracted by the New York City Council to study risk of foreclosure in the city, Parodneck engaged **HERG** researchers to examine in detail the issue of housing affordability in Manhattan Community Board 9 (the Harlem neighborhood).

HERG also participated in two notable exhibitions on publicly-funded housing. In 2006-2007, Roger Williams University (Rhode Island) funded the installation at its architecture school of an exhibition entitled “The Urban Development Corporation: Policy & Design for Housing,” which was originally created for a **HERG**-supported symposium held at the Graduate Center in 2005. In Spring 2007, New York’s Center for Architecture hosted an exhibition on the theme “Housing Becomes Home,” a photo essay on how public housing residents succeed in turning their spaces into “home.” This exhibition and an accompanying roundtable discussion were developed and organized by Environmental Psychology doctoral candidate Gabrielle Bendiner-Viani, with the support and participation of **HERG** Director Susan Saegert.

Public Space Research Group (PSRG)

Director: Professor Setha Low

A **PSRG** team is conducting interviews with coop and condo residents in a research project that has received initial funding from the National Coop Bank. The goal of this research is to understand the criteria that coops and condos use in judging applicants, and in general to relate coop and condo ownership to conceptualizations of “public space” and “private space.” During the past year, portions of **PSRG** Director Setha Low’s work on the rise and impact of gated communities in the U.S. appeared in a collection of essays, *The Politics of Public Space* (Routledge, 2006), which she edited together with Prof. Neil Smith, Director of the Graduate Center’s Center for Place, Culture, and Politics. Another notable event for **PSRG** in the past year was the election of Professor Low as President of the American Anthropological Association for 2007-2008.

Youth Studies Research Group (YSRG)

Co-Directors: Professors Michelle Fine and Colette Daiute

Michelle Fine obtained renewal funding from the Glass Foundation to support doctoral and post-doctoral work on the topic of “Teen Women’s Sexuality.” Glass Foundation funding has also enabled Prof. Fine’s doctoral student research team to produce an assessment of the past 25 years of programming by Planned Parenthood of Central Florida. In addition, Prof. Fine’s researchers have been involved in a study of New Jersey’s Special Review Assessment, an alternative pathway to high school graduation whose validity has recently been called into question by state education officials. (This investigation has been partly underwritten by a grant from the Schumann Fund for New Jersey.)

Also on the secondary school education front, a **YSRG** research project has undertaken work with the Fund for the City of New York to examine the implications of the GED as a path to high school graduation in NYC.

In the past year, Colette Daiute received grants from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP),

a federally-supported organization, and from the research foundation of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Prof. Daiute's research centers on story-writing as a means to intervene in and provide support for the complex developmental processes undergone by youth in post-conflict societies (particularly, the states of the former Yugoslavia). The USIP funding has enabled Prof. Daiute to work with community centers in the Balkans, where Maja Turniški, a CUNY doctoral student in Psychology now residing in Croatia, has provided the project with consultant services. The NCTE award, meanwhile, has permitted an extension of the project's workshop activities to New York-area community centers that provide support to immigrants from the former Yugoslavia. For the next stage of her research, Prof. Daiute is applying for funding to create a high school-level curriculum that will use innovative online activities and research projects in order to link US classrooms having significant immigrant enrollments to peer classes in the migrants' home countries.

Health & Society Research Group (H&SRG)

Co-Directors: Professors Tracey A. Revenson & Mary Clare Lennon

This new research group was created in the Spring of 2007 in light of the burgeoning research in health and society at the GC and the appointment of Mary Clare Lennon, a noted sociologist of gender and health, to the Graduate Center in January 2007. Dr. Lennon brings a portfolio of research to the GC and will also commence new initiatives in collaboration with other GC faculty.

Long-time CHE affiliate Professor Tracey Revenson continues her research on adaptation to chronic illnesses among people with chronic disease and their families and on the effects of racism on health. In 2006, Prof. Revenson was awarded a two-year National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute grant for a project entitled "Systematic Review: Measures of Sexual Quality of Life for Female Cancer Survivors." Her Co-Principal Investigator, Sara McClelland, is a graduate student in Social-Personality Psychology. Dr. Revenson also received a no-cost continuation for a third year of her NCI/NIH grant, "Expressive Writing & Adjustment to Colorectal Cancer," in collaboration with Dr. Stephen Lepore of Temple University. The study is a clinical trial examining the effectiveness of a behavioral intervention (journal writing) to increase psychological adjustment to colorectal cancer. Ms. Julie Pranikoff, a doctoral candidate in Environmental Psychology, is the Project Director. Dr. Revenson also received a PSC-CUNY grant for 2007-2008 entitled "Pain-Coping Profiles and Treatment Outcomes in Rheumatoid Arthritis."

In addition, Dr. Revenson received a grant from the American Psychological Association to enhance ethnic minority recruitment and retention in Psychology at the Graduate Center. Some of the activities of that grant, including mentoring workshops, will be open to doctoral students in CHE as well.

Prof. Lennon serves as Project Director on an NIH-funded grant entitled "Services Research Innovation for the Homeless Mentally Ill" (parent grant at Columbia University). This project focuses on sophisticated statistical modeling to analyze trajectories of social disadvantage. She is also the PI for start-up funds allocated to her by CUNY Central, and plans to collaborate with

faculty members at the Graduate Center and at other CUNY campuses in the next three years in writing funding proposals, especially those directed toward federal agencies.

Since 2005, GC Psychology faculty member Professor William Cross has served as the PI on an NIH sub-award (Minority Supplement) of an NIH/National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute project entitled “Racism, Coping and Ambulatory Blood Pressure,” the parent grant of which is located at St. Johns University. The supplement went to Ms. Danielle Beatty, a doctoral student in Social Personality Psychology who will begin an NHLBI postdoctoral fellowship in Behavioral Cardiology at the University of Pittsburgh in September 2007.

CHE Partners

The **CUNY Urban Health Collaborative**, a cross-campus, trans-disciplinary effort to strengthen teaching, research and practice in urban health throughout the CUNY system continues to collaborate with CHE on health programming. The five-year NIH Roadmap Curriculum Development Award made to Urban Health Collaborative faculty Susan Saegert and Nick Freudenberg supports interdisciplinary symposia and research projects. A major project of the UHI has been the CUNY Campaign against Diabetes, a five-year effort supported by the CUNY Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. This project involves a variety of activities, from diabetes risk and prevalence surveys in the CUNY community, to development and piloting of educational programs and other interventions for CUNY students, staff, and their communities. Hollie Jones, Ph.D., was hired as the Coordinator for this campaign. In addition to her Campaign organizing activities, Dr. Jones has collaborated on grant-writing for diabetes-related projects. To date she has received start-up funding from the American Psychological Association for research on mistrust of healthcare systems and prevalence of Type 2 Diabetes among ethnic minorities.

In the past year, Center for Human Environments affiliate organization **ActKnowledge** has undertaken projects relating to secondary education, public provision of legal services, and housing. Among the sponsors of these projects are the California Endowment, the Children’s Aid Society, Girl Scouts USA, Women for Women International, and the Trust for Public Land. **ActKnowledge** is also piloting a web-based resource, “Theories of Change,” which is designed as an aid to planning and evaluating social change projects. This interactive website, found at <http://www.theoryofchange.org>, was produced with assistance from the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, and has been underwritten by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The past year also witnessed an expansion of **ActKnowledge**’s scope in several respects, for example in its partnership with HelmePark, UK, a British-based organization that helps voluntary and public agencies evaluate and improve their services. Another accomplishment was the release of an **ActKnowledge** study of the legal services available to low-income NYC residents who face eviction. Conducted on behalf of the Brennan Center for Social Justice at NYU, this research was cited in a *New York Times* editorial (April 15, 2007) advocating more publicly-funded legal services, especially for low-income seniors.

B. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The Center for Human Environments continues to grow and thrive, in terms of the number of grants it administers, and with the addition of a new research group (Health & Society) and a new faculty member, Mary Clare Lennon.

There are three major goals for CHE as we go forward:

1. Strengthen the Health & Society Research Group and more finely coordinate its activities. The H&SRG will have regular meetings beginning in September 2007.
2. Increase the number of submitted grants by CHE investigators in the next three years. In order to accomplish this goal, CHE plans to hold 1-2 grant-writing workshops for new investigators (e.g., advanced graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty who have not previously submitted grants). CHE faculty will also be urged to attend other sponsored research information sessions and technical assistance workshops at NIH or similar venues whenever possible.
3. Conduct a major overhaul of the CHE website to make it more useful to CHE researchers and to sponsors and potential sponsors. Office Manager Jared Becker will work on both web design and content of the website, making it easier for CHE investigators to update their pages on a regular basis. The home page will provide a monthly update of activities and we will send it as a “blast” to all current, past and potential funding agencies, to keep CHE in the “public eye”.

C. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Below is a selection of publications of the research conducted by Center for Human Environment affiliates in 2005, 2006 and the first half of 2007.

1. Books

Daiute, C., Beykont, Z., Nucci, L. (Eds.) (2006) *International Perspectives on Youth Conflict and Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Fine, M. & Sirin, S. (in press) *Understanding Muslim-American Youth*. New York: NYU.

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2. Book Chapters

Fine, M., Tuck, J.E. and Zeller-Berkman, S. (2006) Do you believe in Geneva? In N. Denzin, L.T. Smith and Y. Lincoln, *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Knowledges*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Fine, M. & Torre, M.E. (2006). Theorizing Audience, Products and Provocation. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of Action Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

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3. Articles

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Fine, M. and Torre, M.E. (2006) "Intimate Details: Participatory Action Research in Prison." *Action Research*, 4, 3.

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4. Conferences and meetings sponsored by CHE

Among the meetings sponsored or co-sponsored by CHE in 2006-7:

CUNY Urban Health Collaborative events at the Graduate Center
Participatory Action Research Collective Working Group (Michelle Fine)
Jocelyn Solis Memorial Lecture (Colette Daiute, Manager)

5. Websites

CHE's website: <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/>

ActKnowledge, with the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. Theory of Change website: <http://www.theoryofchange.org>

Participatory Action Research website hosting work by Professor **Michelle Fine**, GC doctoral students, and alumni: <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/start.htm>

Website of CHE partner organization, the CUNY Urban Health Collaborative: <http://www1.cuny.edu/academics/centers-and-institutes/urban-health.html>

6. Reports and monographs

Low, S., and Taplin, D, with Mara Heppen and Andrew Kirby. (2006) *Ethnographic Overview and Assessment: Fire Island National Seashore*. Prepared for the National Park Service by the Public Space Research Group at the Graduate School and University Center, CUNY.

Sutton, S.E., Kemp, S. P., Gutiérrez, L., & **Saegert, S.** (2006) *Urban Youth Programs in America: A Study of Youth, Community, and Social Justice Conducted for the Ford Foundation*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

C. GRADUATE STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

During 2006-2007, 40 graduate students received compensation or fellowship support from research projects administered by the Center for Human Environments.

D. GRANTS AND INCOME

Active Grants (2006-2007)

Project Title: Racism, Coping, and Ambulatory Blood Pressure/Minority Supplement
Principal Investigator: William Cross; Co-Investigator: Danielle Beatty
Funding Agency: NIH (parent grant at St. John's University)

Project Title: Young People's Understandings of Conflict and Collective Action in the Former Yugoslavia: Case Study in Post-War Croatia
Principal Investigator: Colette Daiute
Funding Agency: United States Institute of Peace

Project Title: Dynamic Story-writing in Transitions from Conflict to Peace
Principal Investigator: Colette Daiute
Funding Agency: National Council of Teachers of English

Project Title: Child Development in a Transitional Nation
Principal Investigator: Colette Daiute
Funding Agency: PSC-CUNY

Project Title: Graduate Student Support: Studies in Critical Consciousness and Social Activism
Principal Investigator: Michelle Fine
Funding Agency: Leslie Glass Foundation

Project Title: Impact of the Special Assessment Review in New Jersey Secondary Education
Principal Investigator: Michelle Fine
Funding Agency: Schumann Fund for New Jersey

Project Title: The Changing Geography of Childhood
Principal Investigator: Roger Hart
Funding Agency: NSF

Project Title: Early Childhood Environmental Research Consortium
Co-Principal Investigator: Roger Hart
Funding Agency: CUNY Collaborative Incentive Award

Project Title: Medical Mistrust and Perception of Discrimination among Ethnic Minorities with Type 2 Diabetes
Project Director: Hollie Jones
Funding Agency: American Psychological Association

Project Title: "It's All Happening at the Zoo": Children's Relationship to the Animal World as Experienced at Zoos
Principal Investigator: Cindi Katz
Funding Agency: Bowne Foundation

Project Title: Services Research Innovations for Homeless Mentally III
Project Director: Mary Clare Lennon
Funding Agency: NIH (parent grant at Columbia University)

Project Title: Start-Up Research Funds
Principal Investigator: Mary Clare Lennon
Funding Agency: CUNY Central (Dean Gillian Small, Co-PI)

Project Title: Private Governance in Coops and Gated Communities in New York
Principal Investigator: Setha Low
Funding Agency: National Coop Bank

Project Title: Systematic Review: Measures of Sexual Quality of Life for Female Cancer Survivors
Principal Investigator: Tracey Revenson
Funding Agency: National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute

Project Title: Expressive Writing & Adjustment to Colorectal Cancer
Co-Principal Investigator: Tracey Revenson
Funding Agency: National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute (parent grant at Temple Univ.; PI Steven Lepore)

Project Title: Pain-Coping Profiles and Treatment Outcomes in Rheumatoid Arthritis.
Principal Investigator: Tracey Revenson
Funding Agency: PSC-CUNY

Project Title: The Ambassador and Mentoring/Outreach/Research Experience (MORE): Programs for Ethnic Minority Recruitment, Retention and Training.
Principal Investigator: Tracey Revenson
Funding Agency: American Psychological Association

Project Title: American Educational Research Association/IES postdoctoral fellow
Principal Investigator: Martin Ruck
Funding Agency: US Department of Education

Project Title: Housing Affordability in Manhattan Community Board 9
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agency: Parodneck Foundation

Project Title: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Nonprofit Homeownership Education Services: Focus Group Research with Post-Purchase Clients and NWO Staff
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agency: Freddie Mac

Project Title: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Nonprofit Homeownership Education Services: Focus Group Research with Post-Purchase Clients and NWO Staff
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agency: NeighborWorks America

Project Title: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Nonprofit Homeownership Education Services: Focus Group Research with Post-Purchase Clients and NWO Staff
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agency: F. B. Heron Foundation

Project Title: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Nonprofit Homeownership Education Services:

Focus Group Research with Post-Purchase Clients and NWO Staff
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agency: State Farm Insurance

Project Title: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Nonprofit Homeownership Education Services:
Focus Group Research with Post-Purchase Clients and NWO Staff
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agency: St. Paul Travelers Foundation

Project Title: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Nonprofit Homeownership Education Services:
Focus Group Research with Post-Purchase Clients and NWO Staff
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agency: Washington Mutual

Project Title: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Nonprofit Homeownership Education Services:
Focus Group Research with Post-Purchase Clients and NWO Staff
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agency: Amalgamated Bank

Project Title: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Nonprofit Homeownership Education Services:
Focus Group Research with Post-Purchase Clients and NWO Staff
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agencies: BPD Bank

Project Title: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Nonprofit Homeownership Education Services:
Focus Group Research with Post-Purchase Clients and NWO Staff
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agencies: Federal Home Loan Bank of New York

Project Title: "Housing Becomes Home": Exhibition at New York Center for Architecture
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agencies: Related Management Corp.

Project Title: "Housing Becomes Home": Exhibition at New York Center for Architecture
Principal Investigator: Susan Saegert
Funding Agencies: 42nd Street Development Corp.

BROCHURE (see attached)



THE CENTER FOR HUMAN ENVIRONMENTS

The **Center for Human Environments** (CHE), located at the CUNY Graduate Center, brings together psychologists, anthropologists, geographers, health professionals, designers and planners whose research addresses the relationship between people and their physical settings. CHE offers a forum for environmental research where the primary emphasis is on examining the problems faced by neighborhoods, schools, community organizations, not-for-profits, policy-makers, and government agencies.

CHE is comprised of five research groups, representing the major areas of expertise and interest of its Graduate School faculty affiliates: the **Children's Environments Research Group**, the **Health & Society Research Group**, the **Housing Environments Research Group**, the **Public Space Research Group**, and the **Youth Studies Research Group**. CHE also partners with ActKnowledge, an organization that works with community groups, not-for-profits, foundations, and government agencies to understand, evaluate, and transform programs and policies and to disseminate research findings.

Sponsors of recent CHE research projects have included: the National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute; the National Science Foundation; the US Department of the Interior; the Ford, Rockefeller, Spencer, W. T. Grant, and Russell Sage Foundations; the American Educational Research Association; and several corporate funders. In the period 2005-2007, CHE projects provided salaries and/or stipends for more than 60 students from the Graduate Center (or occasionally from elsewhere in the CUNY system). Eight faculty members from the Graduate Center or other CUNY divisions were engaged as Principal Investigators on CHE projects over the same period.

Here are some of the areas of interest addressed by CHE-affiliated researchers in recent years: investigating and reducing the disproportionate burden of cancer in minority groups in New York City; story-writing as an intervention and educational device for youth in nations emerging from conflict (such as the states of the former Yugoslavia); children's social reasoning about exclusion and rights; changing use of free time among children in a Vermont town; urban youth programs in the US and their relationship to community and social justice; ethnographies of Fire Island National Seashore and the Statue of Liberty National Monument; public policy and teen women's sexuality; sexual quality of life for female cancer survivors; trajectories of disadvantage for the homeless mentally ill; the impact of foreclosure on low-income homeowners and the nonprofits that assist them.

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