

Clinical Sociology Review

Volume 4 | Issue 1

Article 4

1-1-1986

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Recommended Citation

Fritz, Jan M. (1986) "The Initial Contributions of Edward McDonagh and Marie Kargman," *Clinical Sociology Review*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr/vol4/iss1/4>

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History of Clinical Sociology

The Initial Contributions of Edward McDonagh and Marie Kargman

Jan M. Fritz

More than half a century after its birth, the idea of a “clinical sociology” is flourishing. Evidence of its vitality is increasingly apparent in professional discussions, curriculum trends, and books and journal articles. This section of *Clinical Sociology Review* focuses on the beginning of the field by showcasing some of the initial publications.

In 1931, Louis Wirth, a professor at the University of Chicago, made the first connection between “clinical” and “sociology” in an article in *The American Journal of Sociology*. At least every few years over the next four decades, references to “clinical sociology” or the “clinical” approach in sociology appeared in the literature (Fritz, 1985:14–18). Among the contributors during that 40-year period were Edward C. McDonagh and Marie W. Kargman. Two of their early articles—published in 1944 and 1957—are reprinted here.

Edward McDonagh (1985a) is engaged in research and editorial consulting now that he has retired as Chair of the Department of Sociology and Dean of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Ohio State University. His article, “An Approach to Clinical Sociology,” appeared in *Sociology and Social Research* in 1944, just after he left for military service.

McDonagh was teaching at Southern Illinois Normal University in the early 1940s when asked to serve as that school’s first Coordinator for Regional Planning. The university president had created this position as part of a plan to show that the institution wanted to help solve regional problems. McDonagh’s 16-hour teaching load was reduced by one-half to let him confer with community groups and write a monograph on university resources available to these organizations.

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In doing research for his article, McDonagh had not discovered Louis Wirth's 1931 piece, but he did find Alfred McClung Lee's 1944 definition of clinical sociology. As best as can be remembered, McDonagh (1985b) independently came up with the idea of a clinical sociology and may have been influenced to do so by his work on his dissertation on the group health movement. McDonagh had noticed that "group health associations favored the centralization of physicians and medical equipment in a clinical setting and purported the advantages of pooling ideas and health providers—in opposition to solo practitioners."

McDonagh's article shows his concern for the value of working in "clinical" groups and discusses the kinds of community problems that might be tackled by a clinical research group. The current definition of clinical sociology goes beyond the "clinic" or group approach to practical research advocated by McDonagh to include the intervention he expected of community leaders. The objective is the same—research and intervention aimed at making "a better and greater America" (McDonagh, 1944:383).

Marie Kargman is a lawyer and clinical sociologist who has said that she would like "to be remembered as the Dr. Spock of marriage counseling" (McCain, 1985). Kargman has had a private practice since 1951, and the 1957 article that is reprinted here is one of her first publications. Her article is not about clinical research but about using social system theory in marriage counseling.

Kargman had received her law degree in 1936 and went on to get a master's degree in social relations from Radcliffe College, Harvard University in 1951. One of the reasons Kargman wanted to take graduate work in sociology was her increasing concern that lawyers needed to know about the family as they were changing laws and writing new ones that affected the rights and obligations of family members.

Because the department at Harvard was interdisciplinary, Kargman (1985a) was able to take clinical psychology courses and a practicum as part of her program. She also was given permission to take "clinical family sociology" as one of her three areas for comprehensive testing. While at Harvard, Kargman became convinced that she wanted to do marriage counseling and use a systems approach in her work. As Kargman (1985a) has put it: "I met Parsons and social systems theory—and I was smitten."

Kargman's 1957 paper, "The Clinical Use of Social System Theory in Marriage Counseling," was written after attending a social work conference. Kargman had been "struck [that] nobody saw the importance of roles or social systems" and she wanted to emphasize the utility of a systems approach.

Over the last 30 years, Kargman has worked as a counselor, court investigator and lecturer, and referrals to her have gone much beyond her first ones from members of the local bar association and from university sources at Harvard

and Radcliffe. Kargman also has worked hard to introduce behavioral science into family law and has written extensively for popular and professional publications (e.g., 1960, 1968, 1972, 1979, 1985b).

Kargman (1985c) is the author of a new marriage handbook entitled *How to Manage a Marriage*. It has taken her 30 years to "flesh out the theory" and develop the clinical material for this book on relationships. Kargman (1985a) says the book develops the ideas that first appeared in the 1957 article reprinted here.

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