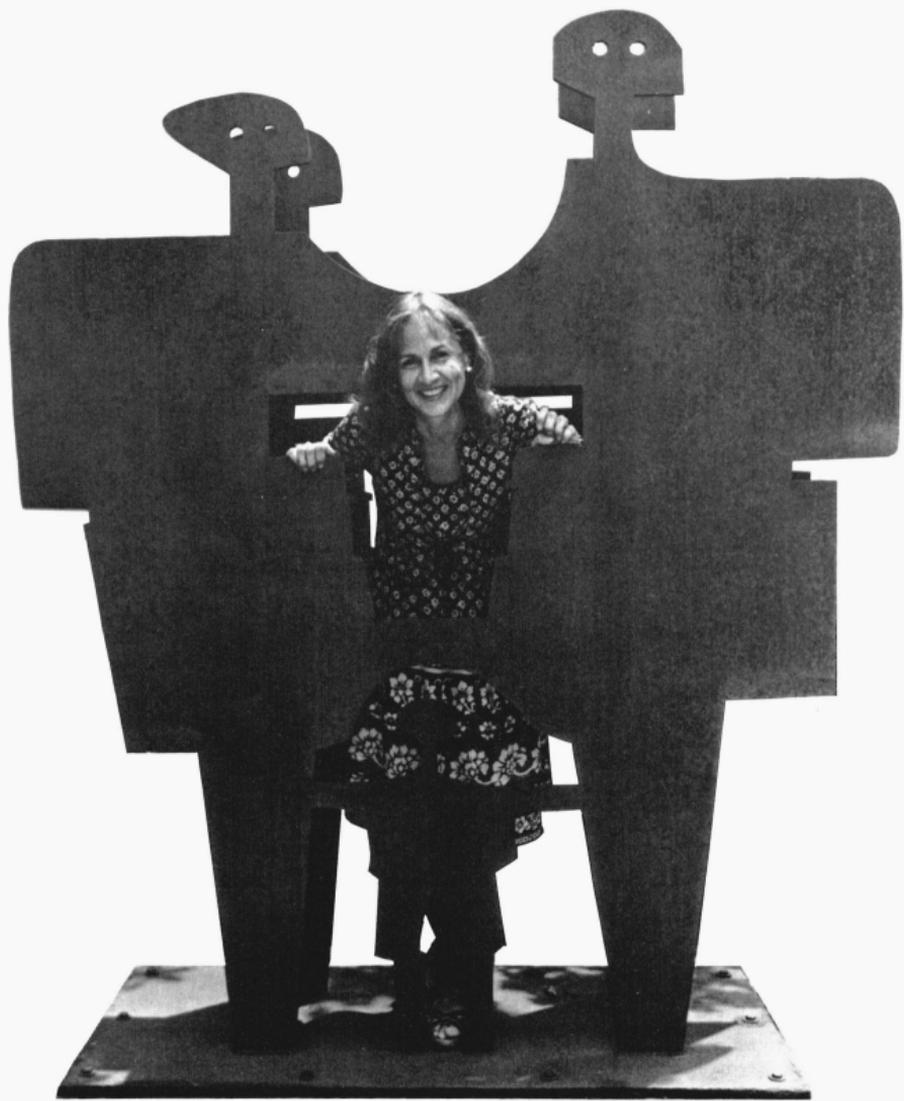


FAMILY AFFAIRS



When it comes to families, Dr. Marilyn Coleman is an expert.

"She lives her field," says Home Economics Dean Bea Litherland.

Coleman, who heads the Child and Family Development Department, teaches about families. She researches the subject. And, as a 45-year-old woman, she has lived through changes in her own family structure that illustrate to students some distinct realities about love, marriage and family life.

As a teacher, though, she must first debunk some myths. Some students in Principles of Human Development astound Coleman. A large lecture course required by home economics, nursing, social work and occupational therapy students, the class is composed of 85 percent women. Many assume they'll have the perfect marriage with 2.8 kids raised by a mother for whom employment is an option.

The statistics indicate a different possibility. The divorce rate is 50 percent. Two-thirds of mothers work. And one in seven children is raised by a stepparent.

Coleman reflects those statistics. When she was in college, the goal was to marry. It didn't matter too much to whom. After two children, her marriage ended in divorce. "Divorce is worse than death," Coleman quips. "You keep running into the corpse."

Unlike the first, Coleman's second marriage now three years old seems built on more solid ground. "We think so much alike, it's eerie," she says of her husband, Dr. Larry Ganong, assistant professor of nursing. Their union forms a reconstituted family. Son Stewart, 14, lives with them; son Jay, 18, lives with his father, although Jay pops in and out frequently.

Coleman and Ganong met over a research project. Now their joint research interests in stepfamilies and sex-role stereotyping clutter up the dining room table, but also enhance their lives.

THE WICKED STEPMOTHER and other prevailing myths add to the stress and complexities of stepfamilies. "There's a lot of negativism about divorce," she says, "and institutions have a tough time dealing with stepfamilies." She gives a typical scenario: A stepchild graduates from high

school and the gymnasium is small. He's given only two tickets for his "family." "What's he supposed to do?" Coleman asks.

FOR CHILDREN, complexities include several sets of parents and grandparents, divided loyalties and new family traditions. Stepparents love and support their stepchildren, yet are legally denied rights and privileges of biological parents, like giving permission for surgery. The absence of a legal relationship means a stepparent who has raised a stepchild from infancy could lose custody upon the death of the spouse. Coleman predicts these intricacies, including custody, will be the legal hotbed of the '80s.

Since 60 percent of divorces involve children and 80 percent of divorced persons remarry, "We're talking about a lot of families," Coleman says. She and her husband, as stepfamily advocates, work with school and church groups to increase their sensitivity to different family structures.

Good research enriches teaching. Love, Sex and Sex Roles; Remarriage and Stepfamilies; The Black Family; Multicultural Children and Their Families; Violence in the Family; and Aging in the Near Environment are among new departmental offerings. Coleman also set up a joint degree program with the School of Social Work so that her students have a shot at jobs with the Missouri Division of Family Services.

As part of their coursework, students work with children in the Child Development Laboratory in the basement of Stanley Hall. "The impact on undergraduates is excellent," says Litherland of the effort to mainstream the disabled with children of low income families and different races. "It's not a WASP orientation.

"Day care should be far more than a garage for children where the most you can hope for is that they don't have a fender bent by the end of the day," Litherland adds. "Unfortunately, there are a lot of garages."

Although parents want quality day care, they don't want to pay for it. Low cost and convenience are primary factors when picking a day care center, Coleman says.

Those who need it the most, often can afford it least.

One plan that promotes both the child's cognitive, physical and emotional development (and pleases parents, too) is corporate day care. In spring seminars, Coleman and other CFD faculty showed corporation executives the advantages of offering such a benefit to employees. Not only are there tax advantages, but the business also benefits from improved employee morale, less turnover and lower absenteeism. Such plans attract new employees and improve community relations. And parents feel less guilty about leaving their children because, in most cases, the child care center is nearby.

Coleman was instrumental in setting up a child care center for the UMC Hospital and Clinics last year. "We have kids here around the clock," she says, "24 hours a day, 365 days a year." Coleman hopes someday to offer the service to all University employees.

In addition to the Hospital day care program, the Child Development Lab offers infant/toddler, after-school and Pigskin Preschool (for children of Tiger football fans) programs.

In the future, the department hopes to offer a total family center, giving students the opportunity to do programming for all ages. It'd be a place where abused children could come in a crisis, adolescents could just drop in and elderly persons who don't need nursing home care could get a decent meal. "It's an ideal combination," Coleman says. "Grandmas can rock the babies."

WITH HER BUSY schedule, Coleman seldom spends time in the Child Development Lab across the hall from her office. A youngster, like four-year-old Ryan Shrout, occasionally finds his way through her open office door. He'll seek her out to help build a car or to take her birthday cupcakes.

"She practices what she preaches when it comes to interpersonal relationships," says Ryan's mother, Janis, a doctoral candidate. "She's interested in different people of all ages, and she's accessible."

Coleman is a Mizzou alumna; she has a 1967 MS degree in child and family development and a 1975 EdD degree in special education. Nominations by students, faculty and alumni netted her the 1982 AMOCO and 1981-82 College of Home Economics teaching awards.



Because of their research, Marilyn Coleman and her husband, Larry Ganong, are aware of the pitfalls and unique situations stepfamilies face. Their reconstituted family includes Stewart, center, and Jay, Coleman's sons from a previous marriage.

"SHE'S MORE than an adviser," says former student Lonnie Smith, a sales representative with American General Insurance Co. in Houston. In 1979-80, he was the first black and first male president of the Child and Family Development Club. "She's more like a friend, almost like a mother at times." Smith says Coleman "kept him on his toes" through a delicate dating situation. Lois Bryant, an instructor and PhD candidate, mentions difficulty dealing with her father's death and doubts about returning to school after a divorce. Simply, Bryant says, "She listens."

Students build on challenges Coleman presents. "Some minority and women students don't have much confidence in their ability," Coleman says. "I push 'em to what I think they can do. I make 'em stretch."

For example, Coleman asked a hesitant Bryant to teach a class, *Interpersonal Relationships, Marriage and the Beginning Family*. "She plopped me down in front of a 90-person class. I had no choice but to sink or swim, and I'm still paddling," she reports.

Ron Jones, a varsity basketball player, was in similar straits. "My GPA was dropping. I was having trouble concentrating on school." On academic counselor Lynn Lashbrook's suggestion, he went to see Coleman.

It was a pivot point for Jones. His GPA improved from 2.2 to 2.7. Someday he wants to work in a youth center. "I wouldn't switch majors for anything," he says. Coleman also keeps reminding him there's life after basketball.

"One challenge after another," Bryant says. "Coleman motivates people to believe in their own abilities because she does."—Karen Worley