

# Samuel Komorita Remembered

June 01, 2007

APS Fellow and Charter Member Sam Komorita, professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Illinois, died of emphysema on December 11, 2006. Sam was best known for his contributions to conflict resolution, particularly the dynamics of bargaining and coalition formation, and the induction of cooperation in social dilemmas.

Samuel Shozo Komorita was born in 1927 in Seattle. Of Japanese parentage, Sam's exposure to conflict came early, when in 1943 his family was relocated to the Minidoka internment camp in Twin Falls, Idaho, where he completed his high school education. An outstanding football player in Seattle, Sam often commented that one of his greater disappointments was being denied the opportunity to stand for all-city or all-state football recognition. Upon graduation, Sam attempted to join the Army. Initially rejected because of his ethnicity, he was eventually accepted and remained in the military until 1947, at which time he entered the University of Washington, earning a BA degree in psychology in 1950 and an MA in industrial/organizational psychology in 1952. Sam then entered the workforce as a job analyst and aptitude assessment expert. He worked at this for a brief time and then decided to pursue a PhD in mathematical psychology. He enrolled at the University of Michigan and studied with Clyde Coombs, completing his degree in 1956. Sam's interest was in applied measurement, whereas Coombs' work was heavily theoretical and oriented toward modeling. This combination was to prove deeply influential on Sam's career. Although he produced a number of elegant models of coalition processes, Sam was also always concerned with the fidelity of his research paradigms to real situations. While at Michigan, he took a seminar with Anatol Rapoport on game theory, which first stirred his interest in mixed-motive interaction.

After a brief period at RAND, Sam joined the faculty of Vanderbilt University. He resigned in 1961 as part of a mass protest of Vanderbilt's denial of admission to an African-American candidate for their divinity school. He then moved to Wayne State University. Racial tensions in Detroit eventually induced Sam to move to Indiana University in 1969. He spent five years there, before moving to Illinois in 1974, where he remained until his retirement in 1995.

Sam's early publication history revealed no interest in mixed-motive situations. His initial research emphases were on the properties of attitude assessment scales and on parental influences on the development of prejudice in children. At this time, however, he was expanding his nascent interest in game theory by reading Morton Deutsch's work on cooperation and Sidney Siegel's on bargaining, and in 1965 he executed his first studies on the prisoner's dilemma game (PDG), the classic "cooperate or betray" example used in game theory. By the time he moved to Indiana, he had completely migrated into the mixed-motive arena, initially emphasizing bargaining and coalition formation. While there, he developed two models of coalition formation: the Equal Probability model and, in conjunction with Jerry Chertkoff, the Bargaining model. (A third, the Equal Excess model, would appear in 1979.) In the 1980s, spurred by Robert Axelrod's simulations of behavioral strategies in the PDG, Sam more strongly emphasized his interest in social dilemmas and the study of how to induce more frequent cooperation in

others occupied him up to, and beyond, his retirement.

Sam's reputation within psychology was as a generous man who was a ready source of help and ideas for colleagues and students. He especially believed in the responsibility of senior faculty to look out for their junior counterparts. As a new investigator, it was your good fortune to have Sam review your journal submission, as he would do everything he could to convince an editor to publish your manuscript. His devotion to the development of his students was without peer. Long after his students had moved on to their professional career, he still looked out for their welfare. The best encapsulation of who Sam was is this: Should you thank him for his generosity, he would demur and say that he had done no more than anyone else would do, though he had in fact done far more than anyone had a right to expect. We will miss him.