



Family Division Newsletter

Society for the Study of Social Problems

Winter 2005

ANNOUNCING OUR NEW FAMILY DIVISION CHAIR – NANCY MEZEY

Dr. Nancy Mezey graduated from Michigan State University in 2002 with a Ph.D. in Sociology. Her specializations are in family sociology, race-class-gender studies, gender studies, and the sociology of sexualities. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Coordinator of the Sociology Program at Monmouth University. As coordinator, Dr. Mezey has been instrumental in developing the Monmouth University sociology program, rebuilding a sociology minor, and implementing new courses. Dr. Mezey's strengths lie in her broad academic training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and her bridging of theoretical and applied work. Dr. Mezey's most current interests focus on how lesbians of different race and class backgrounds decide to become mothers or to remain childfree. She is also working on a documentary about the experiences of an all-Black military unit from Harlem during World War II. In addition to her research, Dr. Mezey has been an active member of the SSSP Family Division for the past three years. In 2003-2004 she served as a reviewer of the graduate student paper competition and co-chaired a paper session sponsored by the Family Division. In 2004-2005 she is serving as the chair of the graduate student paper competition committee and is co-chairing the 2005 thematic session focusing on the merits of marriage.

Dr. Mezey states, "I am very impressed with SSSP's commitment to creating a forum for presenting cutting-edge family research. As family policy is increasingly at the center of political and social debates, it is important to connect theory and practice by bringing social science perspectives to policy discussions. I would be honored to chair such an exciting and important division of SSSP." Nancy will take over as chair starting this August at the 2005 meeting.

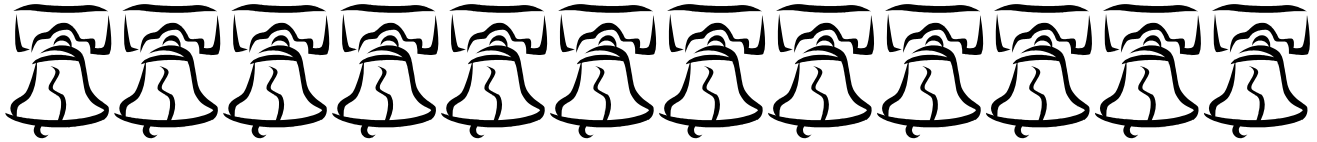


From the Outgoing Division Chair:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the people in the Family Division for their enthusiasm and support as I finish up my time as chair. I've had a wonderful time, I've learned a lot about the organization, and I've met some great people. I'm thrilled that Nancy is the next chair – she's passionate about sociology, and it shows in her involvement in the SSSP. Thanks, and keep up the great participation!

Michelle Janning
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PHILADELPHIA 2005



This year's conference theme is "Blowback: The Unintended Consequences of Social Problems." Papers are in (deadline was January 31st) for the Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. Our session chairs and the SSSP Program Committee are busy figuring out the program, so look forward to further information about the preliminary and final programs. Session chairs are reminded to submit their paper titles and author information to the SSSP Executive Office by March 1st. Thanks to all who submitted papers to the Family Division sessions!

CALL FOR FILM REVIEWERS AND TITLES

I don't know about you, but when I receive flyers for films, I get really excited to watch all of them but am frustrated by the cost of rental or purchase. A handy review of the film would be helpful. For the next newsletter, I'd love to include a film review or two. If you know of a film that works well in a class in family or a related area, or are interested in reviewing a particular film that you haven't yet viewed, let me know. Interested reviewers and suggestions for films are most welcome (though I have ideas for films if nobody has suggestions). Please respond to me via email at janninmy@whitman.edu.

CALL FOR BOOK REVIEWER

If you are interested in reviewing an edited volume entitled *Relationship Therapy with Same-Sex Couples* (2004, The Haworth Press, Inc.), please let me know (email me at janninmy@whitman.edu). The book reviews in this newsletter are good models for content and length. I will send you the book if you are interested. And the due date would be May 31st, in order to be included in our summer newsletter. Remember, a book review in this newsletter can certainly be included in your CV as a minor publication.

GRADUATE STUDENT PAPER COMPETITION UPDATE



We have received numerous submissions on a wide array of topics for this year's Graduate Student Paper Competition. The review committee is meeting soon to finalize the winner, who will be honored at the 2004 meeting (along with a free meeting registration and monetary award). Thanks to all who submitted a paper. If you weren't able to do it this year, we encourage you to look for our Call for Papers for the 2006 Competition. We'll keep you posted!

Student Paper committee:
Nancy Mezey (chair)
Amy Hequembourg
Brenda Solomon
Jane Bock

BOOK REVIEW

Scott Coltrane. 2004. *Families And Society: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Thomson/Wadsworth.

Families And Society: Classic and Contemporary Readings by Scott Coltrane answers the question “where can I find readings that illustrate and expand on the sociology of family topics covered in the text?” The current textbook that I use follows a life cycle approach to the study of families in society. The flow of this reader by Coltrane supplements this type of approach. The table of contents makes it easy to match relevant readings with the topics being studied.

This reader focuses on social construction, social comparison and stratification in exploring family in societies. Each chapter focuses on different aspects. For example, chapter 9, “Divorce,” explores how the meaning of divorce changes by historical period, gender and social class, while chapter 11, “Family Violence,” examines how social institutions and popular myths promote family violence.

This reader matches well with marriage and family textbooks or can be used on its own as the main text. Generally speaking, the writing style of the articles is varied and fairly accessible to the undergraduate. Although this is a new text, it incorporates a classic reading in each of its thirteen subject chapters. Because it is an anthology of articles by the original authors, it can be used at any level as an introduction to family studies. Coltrane’s reader will not serve as the complete overview with conclusions summary and review questions that you get with a textbook. *Families in Society* adds to the typical textbook samples of original writings from both classic and contemporary traditions for each of the issues that are covered in it.

The well-chosen articles are brief and interesting, laying out the main issues in a way that is scholarly, while provoking critical thinking and further study. For example, the article, “Ten Myths that Perpetuate Corporal Punishment” (Murray Straus: 2001), illustrates social construction by showing how popular myths continue to be more strongly believed even when research shows them to be myths. The article lists and debunks eight myths of spanking – such as myth number 3, “spanking is harmless.” By listing myths and showing the holes in the argument, citing major research findings on both sides, and providing reasonable explanations to support his conclusions, Straus leads the reader to the conclusion that spanking is indeed harmful to children. .

The articles in this reader are grouped under the pertinent chapter headings: “Defining Family,” “Sex and Romance,” “Marriage and Cohabitation,” “Reproduction,” “Birth and Babies,” “Childhood Socialization,” “Motherhood,” “Fatherhood,” “Families at Work,” “Divorce,” “Diversity,” “Family Violence,” “Families Over the Life Course,” and “Family Policy.” Each chapter contains three to four articles, one of which is a classic article and the other two or three are contemporary ones. For example, chapter 11, “Family Violence,” includes an article that was written in 1989 by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, as well as two other articles, one was written in 1998 by Neil Jacobson and John Gottman on the subject of battering and the other was written in 2001 by Murray Straus on the subject of corporal punishment.

Coltrane’s introduction to each of the thirteen chapters functions as a good summary of what the reader can expect to learn from the articles in the chapter. This is helpful to the instructor, who is using this reader to supplement a textbook. It assists the instructor with matching articles in this reader to a subject area in the textbook. To stimulate critical thinking each chapter has an introduction with key terms and concepts that are highlighted and are defined briefly in usage, followed by *INFOTRAC College Edition* online database exercises and search key words. Students get free access to the *INFOTRAC* database for four months with the purchase of this or any Wadsworth/Thomson sociology text.

I would recommend this well-organized book as a way to offer students interesting and challenging, classic and contemporary supplemental readings on families and society.

Cheryl Boudreaux
Sociology Department, Grand Valley State University

BOOK REVIEW

Berger, Roni. 2004. *Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories*. Hawthorn Press, Inc.

Berger (2004) sets out at the full task of elucidating, for her readers, the multifaceted ways in which women are impacted by immigration by presenting the stories offered by immigrant women. She uses in-depth interviewing of eighteen women of varying racial/ethnic backgrounds to gather data on this phenomenon. Her findings suggest that immigration is experienced differently by women and men. The major differences that she addresses stem from the gendered demands of immigrants as well as the particular challenges facing women because of their vulnerability in patriarchal nations. Berger incorporates contemporary theories on immigration as well as knowledge gained from her own lived experience as a female immigrant.

The monograph is divided into three major parts: Understanding and Studying Women's Migration, Stories of Immigrant Women, and Conclusions and Implications. The first portion of the book lays the theoretical and methodological groundwork for Berger's research. The language is equally informative and user-friendly for students. The second portion of the book (the bulk) is dedicated to communicating the voices of the women. Berger incorporates narratives from women who have had a variety of migratory experiences. For some, there was migration from a home country to a receiving country. For others, migration meant settling in different locations. We, the readers, are presented with the experiences of documented and undocumented immigrants, those who left for economic reasons, persecution, or the desire to start anew. The final portion of the monograph is focused on interpretation and discussion of Berger's findings as well as some guidelines for social policy and the delivery of services to this population of women/immigrants.

Women do everything, men do the rest. (Russian Proverb) Two common themes that surfaced throughout the many narratives in the text are resilience and adaptability. The women, self-identified bearers of culture, all express their need to survive and adapt so that they may fulfill their responsibilities to their families. Mastery of the language is identified, at some point in the interview, as a key requirement by all of the women. For some, mastery was a necessity, because as mothers they had to be able to facilitate their families' acculturation, manage a home, and interact with teachers and doctors. In the case of women who migrated as children, mastery of language was a necessity for school performance and integration. Reflected in the above stated proverb, women noted that men had a certain luxury in being able to take their time in the acculturation process while they had no choice but to hit the ground running. A challenge commonly identified by the women was a sense of duality. They considered themselves having each foot in two different lands, never fully belonging to either nation of origin or nation of residence. Some women dealt with this sense of "being spread across lands" by immersing themselves in ethnic enclaves, others sought the road to assimilation by going so far as to not speaking their native language at home. Most women sought an in-between wherein they could integrate their different "selves." Finally, Berger found that adherence to religion and tradition norms served as resources for women when they were facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Using Feminist Inquiry, Berger takes a qualitative approach to gathering her data and analyzing it. In keeping with this paradigm, she allows participants who are fluent in English and/or expressed an interest and willingness to view the transcripts to do so. They were given the opportunity to review and provide comments. All approved and expressed satisfaction with what they read except one woman who chose to omit a personal fact. An unfortunate shortcoming of the finished product was that while Berger identifies racism and hints at ethnocentrism as being added challenges in the immigration process, she never explores the added complexity of being female, an immigrant and a racial/ethnic minority. One of the participants in the study mentions that she is a lesbian. She speaks, briefly, of the different attitudes in her nation of origin and nation of residence but this other intersection, sexual identification coupled with gender and nationality status, are not thoroughly addressed. Arguably, there is only so much one can do in a single monograph.

In conclusion, Berger can be of great utility for a methods class, specifically qualitative methods. The text could easily be adopted for sociology, psychology or gender studies classes. The engaging narratives will draw in the most "finicky" of students. Reading the women's words leave the reader(s) feeling connected to the subject. Through insightful prose, Berger weaves a rich tapestry of the unique experiences had by women when they make the choice (or are forced) to emigrate.

Nicole E. Banton
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