

SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS – Spring 2020, Issue One  
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### NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

Hello Sociology & Social Welfare Division Members,

With a heavy heart I write my comments knowing that we will not be getting together in San Francisco this year for the SSSP Annual Meeting. We can only hope that we remain safe, healthy, and stable. Please reach out to your fellow SSSP members for support and solidarity during these truly trying times. Seek to see the beauty, as well.

*My mantra has been: Safe, Simple, Essential.*

#### \*SSSP Membership Renewal

Reminder: please renew your membership for 2021. While we are in trying times, we want our divisions strong and healthy. Your society and division membership monies help fund all the cool division sponsored projects!

Renew here: <https://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/255/fuseaction/ssspmember.portal/userid/-1>

#### \*Nominations for key positions, Due June 15, 2020

Please to submit nominations for important SSSP positions. YOU and YOUR MEMBERS can also SELF-NOMINATE or consider a "shout out" to your graduate students who can also run for these positions.

Nominate here: <https://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/pageid/2178>

### 2020 ANNUAL MEETING

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 SSSP Annual Meeting in San Francisco has been cancelled. Our primary concern is the health and safety of our members. We appreciate the feedback and support that we have received from several members and our Board of Directors.

We sincerely appreciate the hard work and dedication of our Program Committee, under the leadership of Co-chairs Tsedale M. Melaku and Barbara Katz Rothman; our Division Chairs; our session organizers; and the Administrative Office staff. They have worked tirelessly to plan the

program schedule. Meanwhile, the Board has been meeting regularly via Zoom during this difficult period to ensure the safety of our members.

Read the full letter from the SSSP President and Executive Officer.

[https://www.sssp1.org/file/2020AM/SSSP\\_Cancellation\\_Memo.pdf](https://www.sssp1.org/file/2020AM/SSSP_Cancellation_Memo.pdf)

## CHANGES TO THE MISSION STATEMENT

Our current mission statement says:

*Our division's mission is to develop and promote an understanding of and knowledge about the social institutions, structures and processes that create and perpetuate inequality, exclusion and oppression...[we] support the dissemination of research and conversations that assist in the creation and development of public policies, affirmative actions and social services through the application of social science knowledge, perspectives, methods and technology.*

At our division meeting in August we discussed condensing and updating it. Below is a suggested replacement to our current mission that includes a VISION and MISSION statement. Please send your thoughts, suggestions, revisions, re-articulations to me to inform a revised mission statement. MEMBERS WILL BE ASKED TO APPROVE PROPOSED CHANGES IN THE NEXT DIVISION NEWSLETTER.

**VISION:** The Sociology and Social Welfare Division supports a vision of a just society.

**MISSION:** Our division promotes theory informed, applied scholarship about social institutions, structures, and processes to foster understanding, and also speed remedy of inequality, exclusion and oppression.

## DIVISION BOOK REVIEW PROJECT: Call for book recommendations

The Sociology and Social Welfare (S&SW) division releases a newsletter three times annually with a section dedicated to review a book published by an author who is an active member of our division (or review of a book held in high regard by one or more active members of the division).

This newsletter features a review of "Surviving Poverty: Creating Sustainable Ties among the Poor" by Joan Maya Mazelis (NYU, 2017). Review by Michael O. Johnston, Ph.D., [johnstonmo@wmpenn.edu](mailto:johnstonmo@wmpenn.edu).

## Overview

The research conducted by Mazelis for *Surviving Poverty* is a careful examination of the social experiences had by people who live below the poverty level. She draws upon in-depth interviews conducted with poor people in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to explore the adversities they experience, their survival strategies, as well as identifies the benefits and consequences that come with developing or avoiding social ties with others.

Mazelis focuses on the obstacles faced by marginal groups in society when they are confronted with (and buy into) a society that is rooted in neoliberal individualism and an achievement ideology. She found widespread belief among participants that successes are achieved by one's individual efforts and their failures are a product of insufficient effort. Many of the participants in this study resisted the belief that structural barriers exist as a way to maintain class boundaries (i.e., to ensure that poor people remain poor). Participants held themselves accountable for their own failures and used innovative techniques to survive poverty. They used this independence to bolster their notion of being in control and having agency in the decisions they make.

Mazelis used an achievement ideology to understand the decision-making process of impoverished populations. She observed that participants would often make a first attempt to resolve their own struggles before seeking-out assistance from others. The people, however, would almost always be required to resort to social ties in order to survive. Mazelis provided a great model to represent and explore the social lives of people who are on the margins as being somewhere between completely integrated and completely isolated.

### Contribution

The in-depth interviews conducted by Mazelis provided a personal account of everyday life for the marginalized. She was able to draw recognition to the believed dichotomy of people either being completely isolated or socially integrated. Through this research she shed light on the realities of how marginal populations are usually somewhere along this spectrum of being isolated or socially integrated. The closest example Mazelis was able to provide of people who are completely integrated were those who participated in the Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU). The people of this group, however, still found it difficult to have a reciprocal relationship with the community. Mazelis was able to bring light to whether all humans are as social of beings as they are presented to be by sociologists.

### Strengths

Mazelis provided a concise account of the experiences of the impoverished population in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and from KWRU. Mazelis showed great skill in bringing the stories of the participants to life and still fulfilling the role of scientist by analyzing the data received. The narrative of this book forced readers to think about the experiences of the impoverished and to see these people as not being so far distant outsiders in society. The book provided clarity on the stigma associated with impoverished people in society who often lack the necessary capital to overcome their social situation. Mazelis did well with presenting the participants of her study as humans first.

### Limitations

The limitations of this book are those common with any research that uses in-depth interview as the method for research. Mazelis drew the participants for this study from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and KWRU which only includes a small percentage of the impoverished population. The in-depth interview process is laborious and requires massive amount of time in the field to complete. The method and findings from in-depth interviews are also argued to be somewhat subjective as a result of internal bias that could interfere when transcribing interviews. The observations that were made about the experiences of the people from this small sample in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is but a very small portion of the overall population. The views of the

people sampled for this study are quite narrow and unable to be generalized as a reflection of what all similar people experience. There are many people in society who may not see the results of this study as representing their own experience with poverty.

### Summary

Mazelis delivered on the promise in the title by providing a detailed explanation of how marginal populations use community to overcome the struggles associated with poverty. In her narrative she provides a scenic understanding of the regular encounters with people who are amid an economic struggle. This book would serve valuable for multiple audiences. The undergraduate student who is interested in ethnography or learning more about groups that are disadvantaged in society. The advanced undergraduate student, graduate student, or scholar who has reason to gain greater insight and is encouraged to learn more about the challenges of marginalized groups as they attempt to reintegrate back into a community. This book could easily be required reading for students at the undergraduate or graduate level and for current professionals.

### BOOK REVIEW SUBMISSION

The S&SW newsletter is seeking one more title to review for the 2019-2020 academic year. Please email your recommendations to book review Chair, Michael O. Johnston, PhD., assistant professor, Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences, William Penn University. [johnstonmo@wmpenn.edu](mailto:johnstonmo@wmpenn.edu). We are also seeking a member to serve as co-chair for book review team. If interested, please email Michael.

### NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS INVITED

We encourage members to submit news such as publications, new appointments, and other professional accomplishments for inclusion in a future newsletter. Suggestions and inquiries about less conventional content are also welcome— consider editorials, book reviews, teaching notes, department/program profiles, calls for contributions to journals and edited books, obituaries... Please direct inquires or submissions to the current Division Chair, Ethan J. Evans at [ethan.evans@csus.edu](mailto:ethan.evans@csus.edu).

### PUBLICATIONS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Recognition of members' contributions will be posted in the next newsletter. Please email [ethan.evans@csus.edu](mailto:ethan.evans@csus.edu) to submit announcements.

\*2020 Doris Wilkinson Faculty Leadership Award winner. Dr William D. Cabin, “are pioneer in the truest sense of the word.”

*Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*. I highly recommend that you submit your work to this journal for potential publication (See [www.scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw](http://www.scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw)).