
Book Reviews

Gender, culture and ethnicity: Current research about women and men.

L. A. Peplau, R. C. Venigas, and P. L. Taylor, Eds. Mountainview, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 1999, 368 pp., \$29.95 (paperback).

Race, class and gender: Common bonds, different voices. *E. N. Chow,*

D. Wilkinson, and M. Baca Zinn, Eds. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996, 432 pp., \$29.95 (paperback).

As the projected demographics of our nation shift over the coming decades, professionals in numerous fields are being called upon to consider the ways in which race, ethnicity, and gender shape our lives. By "our lives," I mean the lives of both minority and majority group members; undoubtedly, systems of power which benefit one group over another effect us all. These systems of power represent complex constellations of factors. One cannot say gender alone shapes our experiences as men and women. Instead numerous factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class simultaneously form systems of power and meaning. It is these interactive systems which shape our experience.

The present volumes each represents a compilation of active voices within the discussion of these systems. The first, *Gender, culture and ethnicity*, is a collection of articles written from a psychological perspective. The second, *Race, class, and gender*, takes a more sociological approach to the intersection of gender and cultural factors. Together, they paint a picture of how racial, socioeconomic, and gender differences converge to shape social structures and how these structures in turn influence behavior and psychological functioning.

In *Race, class, and gender*, the third Sage reader sponsored by Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS), many of the articles have been drawn from the journal *Gender & Society*. The authors have designed the volume with a broad audience in mind including students, professionals, and the public at large. Segment descriptions preceding each part of the book offer digestible summaries to aid the reader in placing the articles within a broader intellectual framework. While the nature of the language utilized

makes it most appropriate for an advanced readership, the concepts themselves provide a rich framework for someone less familiar with the subject.

To illustrate one of the ways in which this book serves to connect social structures with behavioral functioning, consider the chapter entitled, "A Way Outta No Way." Challenging the widely held belief that eating disorders are largely a problem of the White heterosexual middle and upper class, Becky Wangsgarrd reveals how eating disorders exist among African-American, Latina, and lesbian women in response to traumatic experiences with racism, poverty, and heterosexism. This rethinking of the "culture of thinness" model, which places emphasis on physical appearance as the root of many eating disorders, helps illuminate the ways in which culture, class, and gender affect women's relationship with their bodies. The articles in *Race, class, and gender* represent both empirical and theoretical work. "A Way Outta No Way" represents qualitative research and is written in a manner sure to engage any reader.

Included in *Race, class, and gender* are articles devoted to the discussion of gender relations, family, and the community (Part 3). In "Family, Feminism and Race in America," Maxine Baca Zinn discusses the importance of considering race when theorizing about family life. The author demonstrates the ways in which two macrostructural processes, industrialization and deindustrialization, have iterated with class and gender in order to create differing family patterns among racial groups in America. Also in this segment of the book, contributions by Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo and by Nazli Kibra discuss gender and migration among Mexican and Vietnamese immigrants.

In creating *Gender, culture and ethnicity* the editors sought to compile a series of primary sources best suited for course instruction, either in conjunction with a textbook or on its own. While the primary audience for this book seems to be students at the undergraduate level, the contents are also appropriate for more advanced students. In order to assure readability, prior to inclusion, undergraduates and instructors critiqued each of the articles. In addition, the authors provide several unique features: a guide to resources, article summaries, and questions for thought follow each article.

Although the articles in *Gender, culture and ethnicity* focus primarily on White, Latino, and African-American populations, there are also articles addressing issues within Phillipino, Native American, and Korean communities. In the article entitled, "Power Structure in Mexican and Mexican American Farm Labor Families, Hawks and Taylor address a commonly held stereotype of the prevalence of "machismo" in working-class Mexican families. Findings indicate that the majority of these families exhibit an egalitarian pattern of decision making, suggesting the need for a reevaluation of commonly held beliefs regarding the universality of male dominance

among working-class Mexican families. *Gender, culture, and ethnicity* includes both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Independent segments of the book have also been dedicated to a discussion of childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and late adulthood. In her article, "Aging Minority Women," Padgett discusses resilience and adaptive functioning among older women of color, exploring how they thrive despite being "old, poor, female, and of minority status" (p. 174). On the other end of the life course continuum, Phyllis Bronstien explores the behaviors of Mexican parents toward their children. Results are compared with those represented in literature on American families. The author stresses the importance of conducting research within multiple contexts prior to the assumption of universal behaviors. While the implications of these findings are not discussed, they would undoubtedly provide the basis for an interesting classroom discussion.

Overall, both books represent excellent teaching tools either as companion volumes or on their own. The articles in *Gender, culture and ethnicity* seem most appropriate for a student readership. The articles in *Race, class, and gender* will undoubtedly serve as an excellent resource for professionals striving to incorporate issues central to culture, class, and gender into their own practice or research.

While both books use the term "gender" in their titles, each volume includes only one article completely devoted to considering the male experience. True, much theory and research up to the present has been generated from a male perspective. However, the feminist understanding of gender as a social construction can undoubtedly inform ideas related to men as it has women. As interest in the psychology of men continues to develop, perhaps more research in this area may be anticipated in future volumes.

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Without Child. Laurie Lisle, New York: Routledge, 1996, 245 pp., \$15.99 (paperback).

In this book Laurie Lisle provides an in-depth analysis of women without children. In doing so, she questions the utility of the terms most often used to refer to women without children, such as childless and childfree, suggesting that these terms do little to describe the entire experience of these women. Her call for the use of more appropriate terminology in describing these women should generate much-needed dialogue and should