



Review: [untitled]

Author(s): Kari Lerum

Source: *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (May, 2000), pp. 506-507

Published by: [American Sociological Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2653945>

Accessed: 15/05/2011 17:39

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=asa>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



American Sociological Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Contemporary Sociology*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

female political activists in India and South Africa, and the career of an early twentieth-century, white, female sociologist.

The power of language and naming is another contemporary theme that weaves through the articles in this book. It is explicitly addressed by Mary Jo Deegan in her documentation of the implications of one's name for women as wives, workers, public persons, and sociologists. The problem of essentialist thinking, especially in relation to sexuality, is another current issue found here in Patricia Gagné and Richard Tewskbury's study of how transgender influences sexual negotiations. Among their themes is the fact that for male-to-female transsexuals, sexual interactions with men before their transformations were stigmatized negatively as gay. Yet after the transsexuals socially defined themselves as women, the same sexual interactions were highly valued as identity-confirming. The authors' analysis does indeed promote a rethinking of the binaries associated with, and consequently undermines essentialist thinking about, gender and sexuality.

The promise of research in the title is also fulfilled in that all six articles present data at the level of everyday life experience. The reader encounters the sense of laundering towels and sheets and cleaning motel rooms, the illogicalities inherent in immigration policies and their impact on home garment workers, and the paradigm shifting when transsexuals talk about their sexual experiences. One hears, firsthand, women's own voices describing their political standpoints, and the texts and meanings of Vietnamese religious heroines. One also sees the visual, material figures that represent these female deities. There is an admirably offbeat quality to the research methodology in a few articles—e.g., Mariam Frenier's piecing together information about female Buddhist figures and Deegan's 23-year quest for documents and information about an accomplished and brilliant, but forgotten, female sociologist. This is appropriate in a book whose purpose is to report on advances in research.

In short, this is an informative read for feminist scholars. My only criticisms have to do with editing. There are typographical errors. There is need for deleting unnecessarily detailed, background information. Does it really matter, for example, exactly when Chinese Buddhism influenced Vietnamese Buddhism? If this issue was important to the main theme, the connection

was not made clear. Likewise, more explicit connection between the theory and data would have enhanced O'Loughlin's article on women's political subjectivities. Finally, judicious editing could have improved a few spots where the authors overstate their case—e.g., Assar's article. Thus the book suffers slightly from an uneven but decided lack of polish. The substantive contribution, however, is significant and outweighs this drawback.

Communicating Gender, by **Suzanne Romaine**. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999. 406 pp. \$89.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-8058-2925-3. \$39.95 paper. ISBN: 0-8058-2926-1.

KARI LERUM
University of Washington

In *Communicating Gender*, sociolinguist Suzanne Romaine examines the institution of gender through the lens of communication, broadly encompassing "conversations, newspapers, television, advertisements, scientific and academic journals, literature, popular music, and movies" (p. 4). In doing so, Romaine also spans and integrates information from an impressive array of disciplines (including anthropology, biology, feminist theory, linguistics, philosophy, and sociology) and languages (including those of Western Europe, East Asia, Africa, and science fiction novels). Each page is filled with abundant illustrations and explanations of gendered communication—making this book seem almost encyclopedic—yet Romaine still threads a cohesive narrative throughout the text. No new theoretical ground is forged with this work, but Romaine has amassed one of the largest and most integrative literature reviews on this topic to date.

Due to the density of references and illustrations, it is wise to approach *Communicating Gender* as a resource book, scrutinizing various sections depending on one's particular interests. As its title suggests, and as one should expect from a sociolinguist, this book has a heavy emphasis on linguistics, and some of its content may seem arcane to sociologists. However, the book is also packed with interesting examples that could be integrated into lectures for introductory sociology or gender courses. For instance, I used the following example about Gertrude Ederle, the first woman to swim the

English Channel, in a lecture to an introductory class:

When Gertrude Ederle became the first woman to swim the English Channel in 1926, the world was not only amazed that she could do it, but that she broke the existing men's record by 2 hours. A London newspaper did not have time to withdraw an editorial claiming that her failure demonstrated that women were physically inferior to men and that women could therefore not hope to compete with men. (p. 49)

My students were engaged by this case (and others like it); I found that such examples successfully demonstrate how women's inferiority is often socially predetermined. Each chapter also concludes with a list of class exercises and discussion questions, some of which are specifically geared toward sociolinguistics (e.g., exercises on grammar and word etiologies), but most of which would be helpful for sociology instructors, particularly those teaching gender courses.

My criticisms of this book are few. It is a bit redundant at points, and its exhaustive references make it a somewhat arduous read. Mostly, I was left hungry for more examples of nongendered or subversive language (other than in science fiction) and, even more important, an explanation of the *social contexts* that create and sustain gendered/nongendered communication. That said, the power of this work emanates from the magnitude and quality of its cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary illustrations. As well, the author's conclusion is important: Romaine argues that "cosmetic" word changes (such as changing "stewardess" to "flight attendant") are not sufficient for eradicating sexism. Rather, significant social change relies on a shifting of the overall "discourse" on gender, which is embedded and interwoven throughout social, economic, and political institutions. While this conclusion lacks any concrete suggestions for instigating social change, it also reflects the multifaceted ways in which sexism takes root. In all, this book offers an impressive and satisfying documentation of the many ways in which communication not only engenders *differences* between women and men, but the ways in which these differences construct and reinforce power differentials between women and men.

Close Relationships, Family, and the Life Course

The Sociology of Childhood, by **William A. Corsaro**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1997. 304 pp. NPL paper. ISBN: 0-8039-9011-1.

ANNE-MARIE AMBERT
York University

This book constitutes an interesting departure and a well-documented complement to the sociological and psychological analyses that focus, respectively, on child socialization and child outcomes. The two concepts tend to present children as passive creatures and as future potential; childhood is merely a preparatory stage for adulthood. In contrast, Corsaro describes children as active participants in their socialization process: They appropriate, reinvent, and reproduce their society's culture. He uses the concept of interpretive reproduction: Children are social agents who produce their own unique cultures. Furthermore, childhood as a social category is a structural form of society—an analytical perspective found more commonly in European than North American sociology. Although Corsaro frequently refers to European sociologists, his book is far more effective than their works generally are because he integrates micro- and macrosociological levels of analysis. He competently mixes the two traditions: His analysis is both structural and interpretive as well as constructionist.

Corsaro intentionally focuses more on young children's relations with peers than with adults. For instance, several chapters describe peer cultures, friendships, and conflict. This approach is useful because the peer cultures that are generally discussed are those of adolescents. In addition, this book presents historical views of childhood and children, an analysis of the effects of social change, as well as a section on children's social problems. The latter chapters emphasize structural variables, particularly poverty, and present a cross-cultural and global perspective. In effect, Corsaro's work is a critical analysis of sociological writings on children as well as of certain ideologies inhibit social investment in children's presents and futures.