

Gender & Society

<http://gas.sagepub.com>

Book Reviews

MARY M. CAMERON, KIM DAVIES, JOAN HERMSEN and STEPHANIE J. NAWYN
Gender & Society 2002; 16; 959
DOI: 10.1177/089124302237897

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://gas.sagepub.com>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



[Sociologists for Women in Society](#)

Additional services and information for *Gender & Society* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://gas.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://gas.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

The Haunting Fetus: Abortion, Sexuality and the Spirit World in Taiwan. By Marc L. Moskowitz. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001, 206 pp., \$24.95 (cloth).

DOI: 10.1177/089124302237897

This descriptive ethnography situates the widespread practice of appeasing ghosts, believed to be caused by abortions, within an ongoing debate in Taiwan over religious orthodoxy, morality, modernization, and women's self-determination and autonomy. So-called fetus ghosts or *yingling* are constructed as a kind of object lesson in conformity to sexual self-restraint and patrilineal ideology, wherein both women and men are affected, but women more so. Hovering unseen around human interactions in Taiwan, fetus ghosts come to haunt the living parents, any future children, and other family members. As Moskowitz points out, "a fetus ghost haunting is a reminder that each individual is part of a greater whole" (p. 148). The author describes how and why the Taiwanese believe that abortion is an immoral act, constituted as it is within cultural beliefs such as Buddhist reincarnation and Confucian ancestor worship and lineage ties, and other general beliefs in fetus souls and an ethos of nonviolence.

Moskowitz understands gender relations and issues related to sexuality and procreation within the context of Chinese forms of patriarchy. For example, sexist divorce laws that prohibit women any rights to children and property, and Confucian ideals of family lineage, honor and duty, limit women's reproductive choices. Within this cultural milieu, decisions about unwanted pregnancy become laden with psychological, social, and moral meanings. Taiwanese women give reasons for aborting fetuses that do not differ substantially from those found in other groups, including being unmarried, a perceived inability to care for more children, and conflict between spouses. However, the resolution to some of the psychological issues surrounding abortion is relatively easy, though expensive—fetal ghost appeasement, around which a small industry has developed in Taiwan.

Why ghost appeasement? Stories about fetus ghosts abound and are told within families and in popular cultural forms such as movies, short stories, and news reports. Ghosts cause weight loss, fatigue, cough, loss of wealth, nightmares, and disobedient children. Fetus ghost appeasement is framed by the tensions associated with fears of sexual excess and sex as being merely for pleasure. Moskowitz's study of the body politics of bedchamber manuals is very interesting, although he fails to draw on cross-cultural comparisons, for example, with other South Asian cultures, to deepen and extend his analysis beyond the Chinese context. His discussion of modern sex education manuals would have been more convincing if placed in a globalized discourse of sexual restraint found in many popular Western formats, rather than claiming them to be extensions of the morality found in older classic texts. Indeed, control over sexuality would tie in nicely with the Chinese government's control over families and family size, as well as its concerns about racial purity.

Atonement for the sin of aborting one's fetus is accomplished through financial means, prompting the author to rightly situate appeasement within a rapidly modernizing and increasingly capitalist society in which gender relations serve as an important indicator of

other changing social relations. The cost of appeasing ghosts is high, and one of the author's main points is that while this culture-based extortion is rampant, women choose to pay for appeasement rituals so as to alleviate the psychological guilt society imposes on them for having had abortions.

There are some problems with the book, though not serious, and it is accessible to undergraduate students in anthropology and women's studies courses. Moskowitz does not explicitly situate the study within feminist theory per se, though it is implicitly about gender, culture, and social change in Taiwanese society. Also, issues of racial, ethnic, national, or sexual diversity are not addressed, and the ethnic, class, and national subject positions of his informants remain unproblematized. Although the author is an anthropologist and the methods used are conventional anthropological ones, the book lacks a sense of connection to his informants. This is partly due to his not acknowledging any difficulties encountered while conducting fieldwork, particularly the most obvious one of a man interviewing women informants about a sensitive topic like abortion. Also, the shortened case studies and interview excerpts are presented in a consecutive, linear fashion without in-depth analysis of any one person or family. Finally, the lack of precise demographic data makes it difficult for readers interested in larger patterns to draw conclusions about the impact of abortion on certain cohorts and about the general context of changing demographic patterns in Taiwan. Overall, though, the author's narrative style is accessible and engaging, and readers will come away with a new understanding of the relationship between gender, culture, sexuality, and politics in Taiwan.

MARY M. CAMERON
Florida Atlantic University

Prison Masculinities. Edited by Don Sabo, Terry A. Kupers, and Willie London. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001, 296 pp., \$49.90 (cloth), \$24.99 (paper).

DOI: 10.1177/089124302237898

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the number of men under federal or state jurisdiction in the United States was 14 times greater than the number of women imprisoned in 2000. Still, there are only a handful of books about masculinity and crime, and until this edited volume, none specifically addressed masculinities in prison.

Prison Masculinities includes articles from activists and prisoners in addition to those by academics. Editors include Don Sabo, a sociologist who has done work on masculinity and sports; community psychiatrist Terry Kupers; and Willie London, a poet who served nine years in Attica. They include writings by prisoners and nonprisoners, to overcome the marginalization of prisoners in our society.

In the introduction, the editors argue that the prison system in the United States does little to stop, correct, or help those imprisoned but instead "reproduce(s) destructive forms of masculinity . . . and . . . exacerbates class, race, and gender antagonisms, thereby creating more toxic confrontations between elite males and lesser-status males and females" inside and outside of prison (pp. 4-5). Prison is a rare homosocial setting where hegemonic masculinity is reproduced in conjunction with, and against, subordinated masculinities.

The volume consists of 39 selections divided in five parts, plus the introduction. "Historical Roots and Contemporary Trends" provides a history of penology in the United States. Mark Kann analyzes American penitentiaries as two-tiered systems in which white men were encouraged to work toward forms of masculinity stressing family responsibility, while Black males and other nonvalued men were viewed as incapable of penitence and true manhood. Angela Davis discusses the overrepresentation of minorities, especially Black men, among controlled populations in the United States. Disappointingly, Marc Mauer's article does not address masculinity as a social construct but focuses more generally on criminal justice policies. Here, as elsewhere in the book, the editors fail somewhat in preventing the marginalization of prisoners because they include writings by inmates only at the end of the section, although the selections are powerful. These three short pieces reach the emotions of the reader and provide a sense of what some men in prison feel.

Part 3 explores the many ways that prisoners express their gender identity within prison. A convention introducing this section, and used often in the book, reflects assumptions by the authors and editors, which, if addressed, could have further illuminated the connection between masculinity, crime, and prisons in our society: *Prisoners* refers to "male prisoners" and *prison* refers to "prisons that hold men." James Messersmidt's article is outstanding for emphasizing the ongoing process of constructing masculinity; however, just two paragraphs of his article directly address masculinity in prison. Other writers in this section discuss prison work, prison friendships, and legal issues with respect to masculinity.

The section titled "Sexualities, Sexual Violence, and Intimacy in Prison" includes the most selections (11), likely reflecting the importance of sexuality in constructing masculinity in the United States. The editors note that "sexuality is a key locus through which domination and subordination are constructed in prison" (p. 109). The graphic details of rape and violence will be disturbing for many readers. Rape in male prisons is not uncommon, and the structure of prison (like the structure of patriarchal society) does little to control violence by men. Ultimately, these selections support feminist arguments that rape is more about power and dominance than sexuality while also making the reader aware of the connection between masculinity and dominance in and out of prison.

In the section "Men's Health in Prison," five selections address preventive health, disease transmission, mental health, and access to health care. O'Neil Stough's account of his attempts to aid a fellow prisoner who was suffering with the latter stages of AIDS is especially moving. We see the humanity of the inmates Stough recruits to help the young AIDS patient in a striking contrast to portrayals of inmates in the section on sexuality and violence. This contrast helps to demonstrate the range of masculinities found in the U.S. prison system.

The final section includes discussions about the importance of considering issues of masculinity for reforming prisons (and inmates). As with many women who end up in prison, many incarcerated men have suffered physical and emotional abuse prior to their terms. Continued emotional and physical abuse in prison will serve none of us well. Many men will be released. How can they be expected to act humanely when they have been locked up in institutions that contribute to the worst that is masculinity in our society: sexism, violence, homophobia, and the avoidance of any emotions other than anger?

With articles by those who have been incarcerated, those who worked in prison, and those who care about prisoners, this is an interesting and unique volume. However, I wanted more direct discussions about masculinities and inmates. The editors do a good job of discussing masculinity in the introductory sections, but some article authors were less effective. Still,

my time reading the book was valuable. I could do without some of the haunting images in the section on violence, but maybe these are the images some of us need to be moved to do something about prison reform.

KIM DAVIES
Augusta State University

Divorce Lawyers at Work: Varieties of Professionalism in Practice. By Lynn Mather, Craig A. McEwen, and Richard J. Maiman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, 244 pp., \$49.95 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper).

DOI: 10.1177/089124302237900

In *Divorce Lawyers at Work*, the authors explore professionalism among divorce lawyers, focusing on the development of alternative norms of professional practice and their implications for lawyers, clients, and the legal profession. The concept of communities of practice is used to frame the investigation. These communities are the "groups of lawyers with whom practitioners interact and to whom they compare themselves and look for common expectations and standards" (p. 6). As normative agents, communities of practice exercise collegial control over members and thus influence discretionary choices that constitute the everyday workings of legal practice.

Divorce lawyers are a particularly useful occupational case study for investigating alternative norms of professionalism. Until the 1970s, the legal profession was almost exclusively male, small firms were abundant, and divorce law had yet to solidify as an area of special expertise. In recent decades, the dramatic increase of women lawyers, the consolidation of legal practice in large organizations, and the growth of divorce as a legal specialty have altered the landscape of divorce practice. The authors demonstrate that divorce law, as a site of professional practice, is now a contested terrain where legal generalists and divorce specialist are battling to define the scope, methods, and meaning of professional divorce practice. These alternative views of professionalism influence how lawyers do divorce law.

Most of the book addresses the ways that normative structures of professional communities shape five arenas of discretionary judgment: technical expertise, client demands, advocacy, firm-client economics, and professional identity. Data for these chapters were based on interviews conducted in 1990-1991 with divorce lawyers practicing in Maine and New Hampshire, as well as material from divorce cases in court dockets.

A key factor that authors use to distinguish among divorce lawyers is the designation of specialist versus generalist. Specialists are lawyers for whom the majority of the caseload comprises divorce cases, while generalists are those who take on only a limited number of such cases. This distinction proves to be very important as these two types of lawyers make up separate communities of practice, each with its own normative structure for how divorce law should be carried out. Generalists prefer that divorce law be governed by the norms of informality, limited legal maneuvering, and nonpartisan advocacy. Specialists, however, have formalized the legal process of divorce, are more likely to make use of a full range of legal actions, and are vigorous advocates for their clients.

The authors provide several explanations for the differences in practice between specialist and generalists. For example, specialists have a vested interest in the perceptions of

divorce law as real law, that is, of law that is complex, technical, and challenging. For specialists to command high pay and prestige, the public and the bar must perceive the practice of divorce law as difficult and important work. Another reason cited is that the majority of divorce specialists are women, while the majority of generalists are men. This is an important point. While the authors do speak to the relationship between gender and the normative practice of divorce law, the discussion is less than satisfying. For example, explanations for why women lawyers address long-term divorce outcomes rather than only short-term outcomes, or why women lawyers practice vigorous advocacy, are frequently grounded in what the authors call “feminist sensibility” and less often in other possible explanations (e.g., claims making or lack of professional power).

While the book is rich in data, it would be strengthened with greater theoretical interpretation of their results. At several points, the discussion of the findings lacks the depth that the data warrant. This may be due in part to the intended audience. The book was written primarily for legal scholars and practitioners. Another concern is that with few exceptions, gender and specialization are conflated in the results. Thus, it is unclear if the patterns reported represent a gender difference, a specialization difference, or both. Teasing out these distinctions would be of theoretical and empirical interest to gender scholars.

Overall, the book provides an original look at a profession during a significant period of change. By documenting the competing normative structures of selected communities of practice, the authors show how professionalism is constructed. This analytic strategy could be applied to other professions undergoing institutional change. As such, the book should be of interest to scholars studying legal institutions, the professions, and gender and work.

JOAN HERMSEN
University of Missouri–Columbia

The Gay and Lesbian Marriage and Family Reader: Analyses of Problems and Prospects for the 21st Century. Edited by Jennifer M. Lehmann. New York: Gordian Knot Books, 2001, 300 pp., \$39.95 (paper).

DOI: 10.1177/089124302237899

This edited collection is an effort by the authors to address the major issues in current debates about gay and lesbian families, including the legalization of same-sex marriage, gay and lesbian parenting, coming out to family members, and gay and lesbian stepfamilies. The editor attempts to remedy the study of gay and lesbian families’ ghettoization in sexuality studies by placing gay and lesbian families within the context of family studies. In her insightful and well-written foreword, Jennifer M. Lehmann pointedly challenges the heterosexism endemic in social science research in general and the social scientific study of the family in particular. She charges the field of marriage and family studies with defining marriage as only legally sanctioned heterosexual marriage and that the focus on the family is overwhelmingly that of the nuclear or traditional family, thus inevitably neglecting same-sex family issues. By contrast, she reviews the contributions that gay and lesbian studies and queer theory have made in redefining hegemonic conceptions of homosexuality and heterosexuality. She shows how these fields have created a space where the perils and pleasures of gay and lesbian families can be examined without treating them as inherently problematic or

deviant. She concludes her foreword by proposing strategies for improving the lives of gay men, lesbians, and their families.

The articles cover a range of subject matter, including economic inequalities and financial management concerns of same-sex couples, the impact of family dynamics on the coming-out experiences of gay men and lesbians, the psychological development of boys raised by two gay men, lesbian mothers' identity negotiation, and factors to consider when lesbian mothers inform their children about their sperm donor fathers. All articles focus on the social inequality experienced by gay and lesbian families, examining effects of inequality, how it is reproduced, and how it might be eliminated. There are a mix of empirical studies, philosophical pieces, and reviews of the literature written from different disciplinary perspectives, although the clinical social work perspective predominates.

The quality of the articles varies. Some articles, such as Peter Swisher's and Nancy Cook's case study of a lesbian mother's child custody case and Pauline Erera's and Karen Fredricksen's exploration of lesbian stepfamilies, are extensively researched and creatively use research on heterosexual families to fill in the empirical gaps on gay and lesbian families while still recognizing the differences between the two. Elizabeth Dolan's and Marlene Stum's piece is a unique examination of how gay and lesbian families are affected economically by the lack of legal legitimization of their unions, and it is so well researched that it is hard to imagine an economic aspect of family life that they missed. In contrast, some articles provide sparse documentation to support the arguments or are methodologically flawed, attempting statistical analysis of data with too few cases and using inferential statistics on nonrandom samples. Admittedly, these limitations are common when studying hidden populations, but it is a situation that needs to be remedied if generalizations are going to be made. There are also some notable absences from this volume. As the title suggests, the articles are limited to gay and lesbian families, so transgendered partner and parenting rights are not addressed. Also absent is any investigation of same-sex domestic abuse. However, the book can be read as a collected argument for the legalization of same-sex marriage, so the exclusion of topics that do not further that argument is understandable.

This book has some shortcomings, but it provides a useful and unique analysis of many of the current issues in gay and lesbian families, some of which have received little attention even within gay and lesbian studies. In particular, the attention to gay and lesbian stepfamilies and the intertwining of families of origin with the "families we choose" are novel contributions. It would serve as a useful introduction to same-sex marriage and parenting debates for upper-level undergraduate students and perhaps would also be useful in some graduate courses. However, the lack of a coherent stream of argument throughout the book would make it difficult to use as a stand-alone text. It lacks extensive theoretical reasoning, which makes it accessible to students unfamiliar with marriage and family or other sociological theories. Family therapists and other professionals working with gays and lesbians and their families would also find this book extremely useful, as a plurality of the articles are written by social workers and other mental health professionals and most selections conclude with strategies for family professionals.

STEPHANIE J. NAWYN
University of Southern California