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FALL EDITION

SEX & GENDER NEWS

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

By Mary Blair-Loy



The ASA meetings in Montreal were spectacular. It is an honor to get to know many of you – whom I may have only known by your research – in person. And it is exciting to learn more about research on facets of sex, gender, and heteronormativity about which I know little.

As always, I have plundered the awards list for new articles and books for my sociology of gender courses. These works on my Fall syllabus now look prescient, as we hear further revelations of toxic masculinity and ugly heteronormativity in politics, news, and the entertainment industry, countered by bold feminist and LGBT resistance.

The headlines are just the tip of the iceberg, of course. Government attacks on the civil rights and dignity of trans people and the allegations of sexual harassment and rape conducted by politicians and by Hollywood directors, actors and producers make the news. What doesn't make the news are the macro- and micro-aggressions by and against ordinary folks every day, and the sexism and racism normalized, glorified, and fed to our children in every G-rated Disney film.

In my mind, the headlines are hypertexted with the insights of Connell, Collins, Risman, Epstein, and Lorber and many others who have shown how gender is a multiply reinforced, structural pattern of practices. And hypertexted again by research by West & Zimmerman, Pascoe, Messner, Cech & Waidzunus, Westbrook, Schilt and many others, which illuminate the construction of dominance and subordination and the policing of gender and heteronormativity in everyday interactions.

What can we do? Some of us engage in broader activism, as Jennifer Reich wrote movingly about in her June Chair's Letter. Some seek to transform their local, interactional communities. Some are activists at multiple levels. Many of us are overwhelmed and exhausted by the responsibilities already on our plate but try to do what we can, where we are.

In our everyday lives, what can we do? Like many of you, I cherish the opportunity to raise a feminist child, who will not be silent when others are abusive or complicit. My 10-year-old enjoys being an athletic and popular kid and sees these attributes as inseparable from his compassionate connection to the human family. In a taken-for-granted manner, my child stands up to bullies and befriends kids who are isolated. My kid is a powerful pitcher and, as a matter of course, plays on the only Little League minors team in the county that includes girls and boys. He plays football with his friends and sings soprano in a professional men and boys choir. In the latter activity, the masculinity contest is around who can hit the highest note. My child is fascinated by huge and hairy scary spiders. He parents his venomous tarantula with tender devotion. He is gentle and patient with this fragile creature, and he carefully places her (live cockroach) dinner right where her fangs can sink in. He is launching a campaign to stop his school from showing Disney's *Aladdin* every time the students aren't allowed out during recess due to a few raindrops.



Please plan to attend the ASA meetings in Philadelphia. The Section, capably led by Past Chair Jennifer Reich, Past Past Chair Allison Pugh, and all the Chairs before them, is thriving. Many thanks to our program committee – Anna Branch, James Dean, Marla Kohlman, Emily Mann, and Abby Saguy – for putting together a terrific line up of panels for 2018. We took your suggestions at the Section Business Meeting in Montreal and ran with them. These

include: Femininities; Gender, Race and State Violence; Sexual Harassment, Gendered Violence, and Title IX; Gender/Sex and Emotional Labor in Work and/or Family; Gender, Health, and Medicine (co-sponsored with the Medical Sociology Section); and our Refereed Roundtables. These are all listed on the ASA's Call for Papers. And we are planning a party! The reception will be at a hip, off-site location, co-sponsored with the Race, Class, and Gender Section.

Mary Blair-Loy

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SECTION LEADERSHIP

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LOOKING BACK: ASA 2017



SALLY HACKER GRADUATE STUDENT PAPER AWARD

Winner: Michela Musto

"Becoming Geniuses and Leaders: Gender, Academic Tracking, and Boys' Misbehaviors in Middle School."

FEMINIST SCHOLAR ACTIVIST AWARD

Winner: Georgiann Davis

DISTINGUISHED BOOK AWARD

Winner: Georgiann Davis

Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis.
(New York University Press, 2015)



DISTINGUISHED ARTICLE AWARD (CO-WINNERS)

Co-winner: Paige Sweet "Chronic Victims, Risky Women: Domestic Violence Advocacy and the Medicalization of Abuse." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*

Co-winners: Lauren A. Rivera & Andras Tilcsik
"Class Advantage, Commitment Penalty: The Gendered Effect of Social Class Signals in an Elite Labor Market." *American Sociological Review*



ESSAY: MASCULINITY & VIOLENCE

Masculinity & Violence, and the Violence of Masculinity

By Tristan Bridges and Tara Leigh Tober

Mass shootings have become a regular part of our news cycle. Research shows that there are more of them and that they have become more deadly over time. They're horrifically senseless tragedies, and the aftermath follows what has become a well-worn path. We come together to mourn the loss of life, we collectively grieve for the victims, families, and communities, we get the generic "thoughts and prayers" statement from political leaders, and we all try to make sense of why it happened. We learn a lot about the killers, less about the killed, and the most clicked stories are those that attempt to make an argument about motive.

This month, the most recent mass shooting (as of November 9th, 2017) was committed by Devin Kelley. He walked into a small Baptist church in Sutherland Springs, Texas wearing black tactical clothing. He had on a ballistic vest, and armed with a semi-automatic assault rifle he opened fire. He killed 26 people, among them an 18-month old child. And he did it with a gun that he'd used as his Facebook profile image. Just one month prior, in October of 2017, Stephen Paddock blew out the window of his high-rise hotel room on the Las Vegas Strip and opened—fire with a collection of similar weapons—on thousands of people attending a music concert, killing 59 people and injuring over 500 others.

The people committing these acts exist across our society, but they share something in common—they're men heavily invested in a really toxic idea: masculinity.

In the meantime, we learned of Harvey Weinstein's sexual assaults that span generations of women in Hollywood. We learned about the great lengths he went to keep his victims silent and of the collusion necessary to pull this off. The Weinstein scandal fell on the heels of news of the serial sexual assaults committed by Bill Cosby. And as survivors came forward to tell their stories, other

high-power men across all manner of political, economic, and cultural life have been identified as serially and criminally abusive. And all of this is happening in the United States have been identified as serially and criminally abusive. And all of this is happening in the United States, a society who elected as president a man with a long history of sexual harassment and assault.

All of these events transpired when the full story of Tim Piazza's death during a fraternity hazing ritual at Penn State in February of 2017 was reported. Footage shows Tim's desperate battle for life, surrounded by a collection of young men—his new "brothers"—who either ignored or further injured Tim while he was dying. Had they simply taken Tim to a hospital, doctors testified, he very well could have lived. A grand jury report recommended over 1,000 separate criminal charges against the 18 fraternity brothers and the social organization itself.

Monstrous men, it appears, are everywhere.

The sheer number of moral crises that men are producing is tough to keep up with. If you care about these issues, you have to continually shift your focus from sexual assault, to fraternity hazing, to mass shootings, and on and on and on. Lately, it feels as if we have to consider a new moral outrage almost daily. And in the tumult, it can appear as though these crimes are unrelated. But they're not.

Sociologist Lisa Wade (2016) drew a connection between the high profile sexual assault by Brock Turner and Omar Mateen's mass shooting at Pulse night club, and she came to a similar conclusion. These are disparate events and we're not suggesting they are the same crime or have had equivalent impacts or consequences. But sociologists identify patterns; it's what we do. And the pattern here is the same as Wade suggested last year. The people committing these acts exist across our society, but they share something in common—they're men heavily invested in a really toxic idea: masculinity. "The problem," as [Wade \(2016\)](#) put it, "is men's investment in masculinity itself."

Masculinity, as it is currently constructed, relies on a sense of superiority and enactments of dominance. Political scientist [Cynthia Enloe \(2017\)](#) argues that men continue to abuse power and people (women in particular) because of what she calls the “sustainability of patriarchy.” And as [Tristan and C.J. Pascoe \(forthcoming\)](#) argue, systems of inequality as durable and adaptive as gender inequality are so pernicious precisely because of this quality—this “sustainability.” Men’s collective investment in masculinity, that is, is a social problem.



Illustration: Moyukh Mahtab

Men heavily invested in demonstrating masculinity commit the gross majority of violence across our society and around the world. In [Wade’s \(2017\)](#) more recent essay on masculinity in the era of Donald Trump, she suggests that part of how we ended up with a president wreaking havoc across the globe is that “we have been too delicate in our treatment of dangerous ideas.” “The problem,” Wade argues, “is not toxic masculinity; it’s that masculinity is toxic... It’s simply not compatible with liberty and justice for all.”

Perhaps we gender sociologists should consider being a bit more indelicate. We need to stop trying to redefine what men turn to when they feel the need to “man up.” There’s something deeply male-supremacist about the whole discourse surrounding “real men,” “manning up,” and the like no matter how it’s deployed. There’s a divide among scholars studying masculinity as to whether there are elements worth salvaging or not. How we can help men achieve “healthy masculinities” is the focus of a great deal of social scientific research, social work, and social justice activism. It’s time now to find ways of asking men to “man down.”

Donald Trump, Stephen Paddock, Devin Kelley, Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, the fraternity brothers of Tim Piazza, Omar Mateen, Louis C.K., Brock Turner, Mike Oreskes, Dylann Roof, Clarence Thomas, Elliot Rodger, Seung-Hui Cho, Roy Moore... The list goes on and on and on. It’s not that we are failing to identify these men as part the worst humanity has to offer. It’s that we seem to continue to collectively fail to identify them as part of something larger than any of these men individually. Each of these perpetrators is most often framed as a bad individual, rather than identifying them as the worst parts of a toxic system. But masculinity isn’t just a part of this system; it is this system.

Sociologists of gender don’t need reminding that the horrific enactments of violence discussed here are the work of men. Whether masculinity is something we should consider salvageable or bankrupt ought to inform our scholarship and our politics. And on these issues, we’re with Wade. Masculinity is the malignant tissue connecting these seemingly desperate events. It’s time to man down.



Drs. Tristan Bridges and Tara Leigh Tober are faculty members in the sociology department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. In addition to other work, they are presently engaged in a study of mass shootings in the United States and discourses of masculinity and violence surrounding these events.



GRADUATE STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

MICHELA MUSTO, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



Michela is a PhD Candidate in the Sociology Department at the University of Southern California. Her current project - supported by the National Science Foundation, the American Association of University Women, and the Haynes Foundation - examines the relationship between gender and students' educational trajectories. Girls are outperforming boys in almost all aspects of education, including averaging higher grades and rates of college completion. Yet as early as age six, boys are identified as more intelligent. To identify how boys become associated with exceptionalism despite girls' overall academic success, Musto draws upon 2.5 years of longitudinal ethnography and 196 interviews conducted at a racially diverse middle school in Los Angeles. Through this analysis, Musto provide new insights into the processes legitimizing gender inequality within the educational system and the public sphere more broadly, thus deepening scholarly understandings of gender, education, and social inequalities.

KIT MYERS, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Kit will complete their Ph.D. in Sociology with a certificate in Gender Studies from USC in Spring 2018. Their work focuses on the intersections of gender, sexualities, and families with medicine, science & technology. Their dissertation addresses the role of medical technologies and gender inequalities in shaping alternative life course sequencing and family structures among professional-class women. Drawing on in-depth interviews with women who have electively frozen their eggs, single-mothers-by-choice, and voluntarily childfree women, they argue that these professional-class women mobilize medical technologies—including egg freezing, donor insemination, and birth control—to address the consequences of gender inequalities they encounter at interpersonal, institutional, and cultural levels, forging alternative family forms and life course sequences as they do so. They find that, while these technologies may ease some of the burdens these women encounter, these individualized techno-medical solutions ultimately fail to address the fundamental structural problems to which they



PAIGE L. SWEET, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS CHICAGO



Paige is a PhD Candidate in Sociology at the University of Illinois Chicago. Her research focuses on gender and sexuality, expert knowledge, and the politics of health. Paige's dissertation, "Traumatizing Politics: Legibility and Survivorhood after Domestic Violence," explores the medicalization of domestic violence and the effects of that shift on both feminist politics and domestic violence victims themselves. Using archival data on feminist anti-violence activism, interviews with domestic violence professionals, and life-story interviews with survivors of domestic violence, this project links together the macro-level structure of the domestic violence field with survivors' navigation of that field at the micro-level. Paige shows how the increasing centrality of trauma-based therapies in the domestic violence field pressures women to perform "survivorhood" in order to access care. Becoming "good survivors" means narrating their experiences in psychological terms and performing psychological wellness in institutions of aid. For women of color and undocumented women, these narratives must be accompanied by performances of 'respectable' motherhood and sexuality. Paige argues that this emphasis on women's performances of psychological wellness transforms domestic violence into an individualized and internal problem, rather than a structural one.

GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

AMPLIFYING GIRLS' VOICES AT GIRLS ROCK CAMP

By Trisha Crawshaw

At Girls Rock Camp, a week-long summer camp for girls and non-binary kids, volunteers plug instruments into amplifiers. Once “plugged in,” campers excitedly ask, “Is my amp on? Can I turn it up? How can I make it louder?” These campers, ages 9 through 17, know how to crank up the volume. They experiment with different sounds—leaning into the microphones, turning-up amp knobs, and yelling call-back chants into an imagined crowd: “Who rocks? GIRLS ROCK! Who rocks? GIRLS ROCK!”

As young people start to discover (and use) their voices, things can get LOUD. Carving out space for femme expression and empowerment, volunteers encourage campers to be unapologetic about their voices and their volume. Crashing cymbals and turned-up amps are the norm—punctuated with shrieks, sharp microphone feedback, and unexpected elbow-slides on the keyboard. There is no template for what we are doing here. Resistance is messy and wild and loud as hell.

And make no mistake, resistance is important at Girls Rock Camp. The program offers girls and non-binary kids opportunities to engage in self-expression. The camp prides itself on helping girls build self-esteem through music education, collaboration, and performance, as well as through empowerment and social justice workshops. In many ways, Girls Rock Camp is an enclave for social resistance. Campers are encouraged to push back against oppressive gender norms. They are asked to rethink binary assumptions about bodies and gender identities. And volunteers design workshops to teach and promote consent, acknowledge gender and racial privilege, and to challenge oppressive heterosexist systems that maintain inequality.

At Girls Rock Camp, one way campers challenge these systems is by coming together to write original song lyrics and performing these songs live in front of family and friends at a public venue. This can be a challenging exercise. Many of the campers have never written a collaborative piece before camp. This process, however, serves as an opportunity for young artists to address specific concerns in their everyday lives. One band, The Ultra-Violet

Vixens, wrote lyrics that exclaim: “Femme isn’t fragile! All your expectations are vile. We won’t listen to what others say; we rock in our very own way!”

Vixens’ message challenges the assumption that femininity is inferior, or less valuable, than masculinity, and they declare that social expectations for girls are indeed “vile.” These lyrics contradict the popular notion that girls are expected to be quiet, weak, or docile. Speaking out against these stereotypes allow campers to constructively





push back against oppressive gender norms. Refusing to believe that all girls need to be submissively similar, the band declares that they “rock in their very own way!”

During a House committee hearing in 2017, Representative Maxine Waters famously quipped that she was “reclaiming” her time. As I engage with young folks at Girls Rock Camp, I am reminded that, in many ways, they are reclaiming their voices. Girls are routinely told to sit still, to take up less space than boys, and to be quiet. Here—both on stage and during band

practice—girls and non-binary kids are anything but quiet. They are plugged into amps and speakers and microphones—they are going to be heard.

The voices of girls and non-binary kids are amplified through the organizational efforts of Girls Rock Camp, which helps campers learn how they might resist the structural and interpersonal barriers they encounter in their own lives. For both adult volunteers and campers, turning up the volume is a political act. Campers have space to express, loud and clear, that their words matter. Girls Rock Camp serves as a timely reminder that we need to amplify messages of change and resistance, and that young people need to be a part of this conversation. They too want to push back against structures that are designed to usher them off stage.

**All photos taken by Mitch Mitchell. Used with permission.



Trisha Crawshaw is a doctoral student at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Her research focuses on gender, bodies, youth studies, and popular culture. She spends her time volunteering at the Rainbow Cafe, a local LGBTQ youth center, and with Girls Rock Carbondale, a music education program that promotes self-esteem and expression for young girls throughout the Southern Illinois community.

ESSAY: NONHUMAN PRINCESSES

The Nonhuman Disney Princesses

By Corey Wrenn

Feminists have been critical of animated Disney films for promulgating outdated gender roles. Women in these films are represented as subservient, dainty, heterosexualized, and fixated on romance and the “happily ever after” with their dashing prince. The stories of *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White* echo rape culture (both are victims to their prince’s sexual advances while unconscious and unable to consent), while *Beauty and the Beast* romanticizes domestic violence and Stockholm Syndrome. The *Little Mermaid* encourages little girls to trade their voices for men’s affection. In most of these “princess movies,” the stories end with marriage. Heterosexual matrimony is portrayed as the culmination of life goals for women. These princesses are frequently the objects of rescue and a trophy for men to win; they are rarely the determiners of their own lives.

Many of the gender norms popular in human-centric Disney films are also perpetuated in those starring nonhuman princesses. These nonhuman princess films perpetuate Disney’s painfully heteronormative and white bias, although perhaps less obviously. They remain side characters to inspire male counterparts, to be rescued, and to be won—and again, marriage is presented as the epitome of a happy ending. Although these characters are deer, foxes, cats, lions, and frogs, they are also overwhelmingly coded as white. Whiteness structures characters’ speech, behaviors, and values. In fact, most of the voice actors are also white. For instance, *The Lion King*’s Nala is an African character, but a white woman of Irish descent voices adult Nala. Nonhuman Animals provide the possibility to transgress anthropocentric categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality. That is, nonhumans do not have a “race,” for example. Therefore, Disney’s tendency to perpetuate dominant ideologies through nonhuman characters cues the audience to identify these ideologies as natural. This cultural conflation of socially constructed categories with biologically constructed categories is a powerful means of upholding inequality. Some problematic representations of nonhuman princesses:

Bambi (1942)

Disney’s first nonhuman princess was Faline of *Bambi*. After meeting as fawns, she and Bambi begin a courtship that necessitates Bambi battling another buck to “win” her. He will later face a disastrous forest fire and rescue her from hunters and their dogs. Following this, he becomes the “Great Prince of the Forest” and starts a family with her.

The Aristocats (1970)

After their wealthy mistress bequeaths her vast wealth to them, Duchess and her kittens are ousted from their Parisian mansion by the jealous butler. Stranded in the country and handicapped by her “white” femininity and hyper-daintiness, Duchess and her children are rescued by Tomcat, Thomas O’Malley. A romantic relationship forms between Duchess (who is lonely after the loss of her former male partner) and her hero, Tomcat.



Robin Hood (1973)

Disney’s animated version of *Robin Hood* features a fox princess who is trapped in the court of the miserable and murderous King John. Robin Hood faces certain danger to participate in an archery contest to win Marian’s affections (and “earn” the kiss). As King John’s sights narrow in on Robin Hood, Maid Marian’s situation becomes increasingly precarious. Robin Hood eventually liberates the kingdom and marries his damsel in distress.

Illustrations: Disney’s *Aristocats*; human interpretation by Alaina Bastien

The Lion King (1994)

The Lion King features a relatively strong nonhuman princess, Nala, who struggles to keep the pride afloat in Simba's absence. A bit of a "manic pixie" character, she encourages Simba to find himself and become the "man" he is destined to be. Consequently, Nala is relegated to sidekick status. We never learn much about her interests, desires, challenges, or background. Predictably, she becomes a love interest and soon realizes her feminine role in producing an heir to the kingdom.

The Princess and the Frog (2009)

More recently, Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* sees Tiana, a young Creole princess transformed into a frog and partnered up with her obnoxious amphibian prince. This film has been criticized as squandering the only Disney princess film at the time to feature an African American girl by presenting her as a frog for most of her screen time. She is also essentially preyed upon by Prince Naveen, who exploits her empathy for his gain. He uses her forced time with him to relentlessly "woo" her until they are eventually married. Unique for Disney films, we are at least left with the understanding that Tiana has a life after marriage, as she founds her own restaurant.

Gender norms may go unchallenged in Disney films, even when the characters are not conventional white, blonde, human characters; but perhaps these films can offer another, progress perspective on the status of Nonhuman Animals. Anthropomorphized as they are, these films pay respectful attention to the unique challenges that nonhuman others face in a human world. Audiences are encouraged to empathize with homeless cats, scorn hunting, take forest fires seriously, and see frogs as complex individuals.

Nonhuman Animals hold a special place in many children's stories, and this is especially helpful for challenging speciesist ideologies that normalize human supremacy and systematic violence against other animals ([Cole & Stewart, 2014](#)). A problem arises, however, when other animals are used as vessels for oppressive norms that marginalize women, people of color, homosexual persons, and other vulnerable groups. When the vixen Maid Marian, for instance, becomes a female object of conquest for the male protagonist Robin Hood in a motley Nottingham community composed of snakes, bears, chickens, lions, and others who are all coded as white, Nonhuman Animals are hardly encouraging their audience to critically assess problematic social structures. In fact, in these cases the perpetuation of oppressive ideologies may even be more insidious—wrapped-up with fantasy.

[bell hooks \(2009\)](#) reminds us that media is a kind of fantasy. It reflects the world we idealize and constructs political narratives. Disney films specialize in fantasy-making and so are well positioned to wield the magic of the movies to inspire social change. It could be useful if more nonhuman Disney characters exhibited egalitarian values. And representing princesses as independent would not be sufficient, as this individualism discourages the collective consciousness needed to restructure an unequal society. Strong female characters that control their own lives, build alliances with others, and are not fixated on men and romance to the exclusion of all else would be a great improvement. Avoiding the anthropomorphization of Nonhuman Animals as white and straight would be similarly useful, because animating animals as a reflection of dominant groups not only obscures diversity, but also treats difference as abnormal given the ideological role they play in naturalizing social inequality.



Dr. Corey Lee Wrenn is the Director of Gender Studies and Lecturer of Sociology with Monmouth University. She is the author of *A Rational Approach to Animal Rights: Extensions in Abolitionist Theory* (Palgrave Macmillan 2016) and book review editor for *Society & Animals*.

NEW ARTICLES BY SECTION

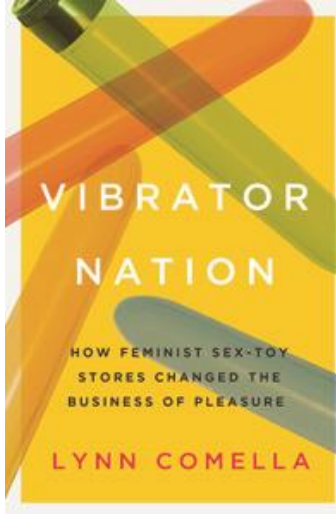
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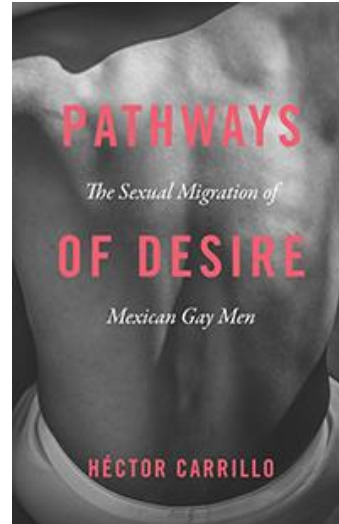
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Please send any information about new books, articles, awards, or other news to our Newsletter Editor, Eli Alston-Stepnitz at ecalstonstepnitz@ucdavis.edu.

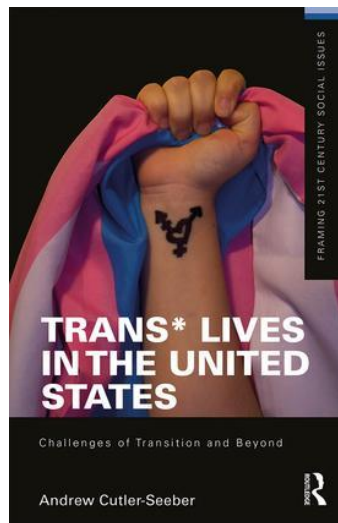
NEW BOOKS BY SECTION MEMBERS



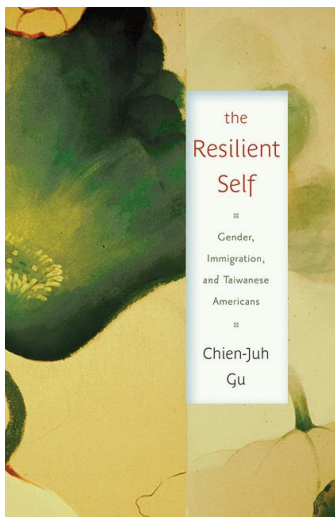
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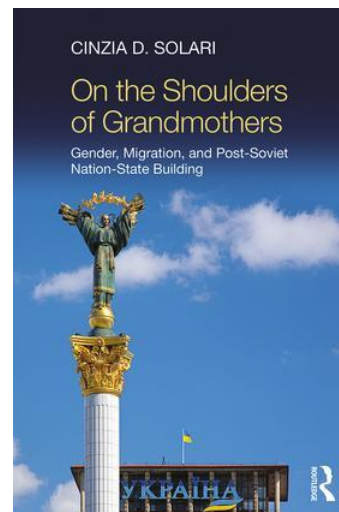
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SECTION ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS FOR SECTION SESSIONS

Femininities organized by Dana Berkowitz & Andrea Herrera

Gender, Health, & Medicine (co-sponsored with the Section on Medical Sociology)
organized by Austin Johnson

Gender, Race and State Violence
organized by Joseph Ewoodzie

Gender, Social Movements, and (In)Justice
organized by James Dean

Gender/Sex and Emotional Labor in Work and/or Family
organized by Catherine Crowder & Mary Blair-Loy

Section on Sociology of Sex and Gender Refereed Roundtables
organized by Asia Friedman & Jaime Hartless

Sexual Harassment, Gendered Violence, and Title IX
organized by Gillian Gualtieri & Marla Kohlman

For more information [click here](#).

CALL FOR SECTION LEADERSHIP NOMINATIONS

To nominate yourself or someone else to run for Chair, Council, or Student Council, please email nominations (including self-nominations) to [Jennifer Reich](#) no later than November 20.

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Jennifer Utrata, University of Puget Sound, was awarded the 2017 Distinguished Scholarship Award from the Pacific Sociological Association for her book *Women Without Men: Single Mothers and Family Change in the New Russia* (Cornell University Press, 2015)

Mary Frank Fox, Georgia Institute of Technology, was awarded the Ivan Allen College Distinguished Faculty Researcher Award, and the 2017 Faculty of the Year Award of the Georgia Tech Student Government Association.

Congratulations!