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From The Editor

In this issue, Barbara Laslett continues the discussion of the sociology of identity formation that we started in the last newsletter with the Eli Zaretsky piece. This discussion will be continued during the session on "Identity Formation in Historical/Comparative Perspective" at the August ASA meeting in Pittsburgh.

The July issue will feature a discussion of the third ASA session sponsored by the Historical and Comparative Sociology Section, "Empirical Explanation-People or Processes: Data, Events, and Aggregation in Historical Sociology." In the next issue we will also begin a new series on historical/comparative research in countries other than the United States.

George Steinmetz

Thinking About the Subject

Barbara Laslett, University of Minnesota

Eli Zaretsky's "A Note on 'Identity'" in the last issue of this Newsletter calls our attention to the way psychoanalytic theory and its historical variants have provided important insights into the behavior of individuals and groups. In so doing, it raises questions of central importance to historical sociologists like myself. My own interest in the subject stems from two related theoretical questions: 1) how are we to understand human action, or agency, historically at both the individual and collective level, and 2) what is the relationship between gender and social action? Let me say why I think this is of special relevance to the historical-comparative sociologist.

As a historical sociologist, I take seriously Philip Abrams' argument about "structuring," i.e., that "history and society are made by constant and more or less purposeful individual actions and that individual action, however purposeful, is made by history and society" (1982:xiii). Jeffrey Alexander, too, (1988) points to the need for contemporary theoretical debates in sociology to move away from their tendency to follow two distinct pathways--one that is structural, another that is social constructionist. He directs us to take account of both social structure and human agency. Abrams emphasizes the need for historical sociologists to pay attention to their intersection. Yet neither recognizes the theoretical relevance of gender to understanding these intersections and neither has proposed an adequate way to discuss agency.

While sociologists, and especially historical comparative sociologists, have put much intellectual energy into structural analysis of social organization and social change in structural terms, they (again, especially historical-comparative sociologists) have devoted less attention to agency, to understanding how and why people--individually and collectively--act as they do under historically specific conditions. In this connection, I believe that sex and gender as theoretical concepts have special contributions to make to our understanding of "structuring." Here my interest in Freudian theory becomes clear. Although I am not competent to discuss debates within psychoanalytic and psychological theory about which variants better serve different intellectual purposes, even a rather simplistic reading of what Freud had to say about sexuality, identity, motivation, the unconscious, repression, sublimation, cathexis, etc. has, I think, something to offer historical/comparative sociologists. I have found Chodorow (1989; n.d.) particularly helpful (see also Mahoney and Yngvesson, 1993).

First, the idea that sexuality, gender, and a gendered sexuality, are accomplishments--something people construct over the life course rather than some in-born and essential feature of men's and women's natures--allows for an examination of historical variability in all three. As such, they have the potential for being independent, not only dependent variables, in our explanations. Secondly, Freud's theories about the centrality of sexuality to personality and to behavior--his discussions of the unconscious, of repression, resistance, sublimation, and cathexis--have several implications for the historical-comparative sociologist. They suggest that some of the motives for actions are not immediately available to actors--we repress and resist acknowledging their true, often sexual meaning. (Freud used confirmation by the patient, when resistance was overcome in the process of psychoanalysis, as a test of the

validity of interpretations; since that test is rarely available to the historical/comparative sociologist we'll have to figure out other ways to verify the model). Another implication of Freudian theory for understanding agency is that we invest sexual energy in social constructs that are not, in any obvious way, related to sexuality or gender at all. And the sexual nature of that energy gives some actions, but not others, a particular charge, a particular strength. Yet it is striking--and this can be seen in Zaretsky's brief essay, but certainly not only there--that even Freudian theory does not necessarily address sexuality, personality, emotion, identity, etc., in ways that are sensitive either to gender or to historical variability.

As I think about the matter now, sex and gender are relevant to action in several ways (this argument is elaborated in Laslett, 1992). First, the gendered division of labor is a basic dimension of social structure and the social assignment of some tasks to women and others to men is one determinant of how and why people act as they do. Action is, thus, likely to be gendered, i.e., to be culturally and demographically defined as feminine or masculine. Second, gender is related to motivations for action. Personal life, sexual meanings and sexuality itself can provide powerful motives for human actions and gender relations are central to understanding them. Third, gendered meanings--particularly, I think, in modern times the issue of gender identity (masculinity and femininity)--are often part of, if not central to, the very constitution of social institutions and cultural forms. Davidoff and Hall's (1987) brilliant demonstration of the inseparability of gender and class in the historical construction of the British middle class between 1780 and 1850 is one important example of what I have in mind.

Yet it is precisely when one thinks historically and comparatively that one is struck by variation in the organization of gender relations--individually, institutionally, and culturally. When reading Davidoff and Hall, for instance, I was continually thinking about how the

American and English experiences differed. Similarly, As I read about the historical construction of family life at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, I asked myself questions about the construction and meaning of family life in the 20th century. Thus, and especially for historical and comparative sociologists, it is not enough to be attentive to issues of sexuality, gender relations, personal life, identity, etc. We must be especially attentive to their variability and think through the ways in which that variability may help explain other aspects of social organization and/or social change.

Part of my attachment to Freudian theory stems from a belief that what gives some social constructions--families and identities but also social movements, and even intellectual currents (see Laslett, 1990)--their special charge, their special energy, reflects what Freud called cathexis, i.e., the attachment of sexual energy and sexual meanings to particular social and historical projects. One example of this can be seen in the development of a modern (i.e., capitalist) occupational structure--and indeed the centrality of occupation itself to masculine identity in the contemporary/modern world. (It is important to note that in the approach I am putting forward, doing a gendered analysis does not depend on the presence of women as historical actors). Perhaps it is the case that the persistence of sex segregation in the occupational structure in modern societies (as well, of course, as the division of labor within the family) has to do with sexual identity, i.e., with the meaning of occupation as masculine (or feminine), as well as with class interests that are related to, for instance, the price of labor power. Perhaps the tenacity with which efforts to change occupational structures are resisted reflects the power of feelings about, for instance, gender identities, as well as the power of economic and/or political interests.

One example will have to suffice here. In arguing against a simplistic rational choice

model for explaining social action, Calhoun (1991) makes a case for the relevance of local or indigenous cultural categories to how personal identity was connected to the participation in the Chinese student protest movement of 1989. In particular, he draws attention to how the Chinese concept of "honor" was implicated in the actions and the transformation of identities among Chinese university students during those six weeks in the spring of 1989. But what goes unproblematic in Calhoun's analysis is whether or not the meaning of "honor" was gendered, whether it drew (and constructed) some of its significance from what it means to be masculine in late 20th century China (which may or may not be the same as what constitutes honor for Chinese women). And what goes equally unmarked, is the possibility that the relationship between honor and masculinity--in this case, in this culture, in this time period--may have given those actions in Tiananmen Square a particular charge, a particular energy, a particular force.

A historical and gender sensitive theory of human agency is, I think, one piece of the complex question of "structuring." It is not the totality. In addressing this complexity, however, I think it is important that we do not conceptualize individuals, cultures, institutions, and social structures as wholly separate levels of analysis (i.e., in terms, for instance, of the macro-micro problem), but rather focus on the ways in which each provides both context and substance for the other, although not necessarily in equally powerful ways. But I also think that we do not yet have a language with which to think about the puzzle in this way. Given that situation, it may be easier to ask questions about the relationship between agency and subjectivity, identity, sexuality, etc. than it is to answer them. But, if my argument is correct, it is precisely because the issue is of general importance that the project of developing such a language is a collective one--not something that can or should be relegated to micro-historical sociologists or historical sociologists of sexuality, gender and the family.

The existing models of subjectivity which focus on rational calculation--as in rational choice theory--are really not adequate to the purposes of the historical sociologist. They assume precisely what needs to be examined, i.e., historical variability in how and why people act as they do. It may be, of course, that rational choice theory can account for contemporary action better than action in the past; such would be predicted from both Marx and Weber's theories of capitalism and modernity. But even within modern capitalism there is variation in subjectivities--and we need to be able to capture and examine such variation if we are to understand "structuring." If we want to discern how and why people make use of the historically specific resources and constraints as they do--as individuals and as members of collectivities: families, political movements, trade unions, nations, etc.--and how in so doing they construct new structures, new opportunities, and new constraints, then for the reasons I have suggested, sex and gender have key contributions to make.

Freudian theory is one appropriate starting place for historical and comparative sociologists to think about subjectivity, about identity, about agency. There are, however, other models for us to explore--those, for example, that come out of social psychology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology, and those, within feminist and non-feminist scholarship, that take account of emotion, sexuality, and gender. Each of these approaches however, has to be developed in ways that are sensitive to historical variation viewed comparatively. We need more generally to develop conceptualizations of subjectivity and identity that are sensitive both to gender and to historical comparative variation that can be applicable to wide range of social institutions and arenas of action.

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A Note From the Chair

Thinking About Democracy

It seems too early to be thinking about the 1993 Annual meetings in Miami Beach since the 1992 meetings have not yet taken place. But one of the main items on the agenda for our section business meeting in Pittsburgh this summer is to plan sessions for the 1993 meetings. I'm writing to urge section members to come prepared with suggestions and proposals. The theme for the 1993 meetings, recently announced in Footnotes by Seymour Martin Lipset is Democracy. This is a great opportunity for our section, given the large number of our members who are concerned, as scholars and citizens, with the comparative and historical study of democracy. My own recent research has focused on alternative visions of democratic politics in nineteenth century France and I've recently finished teaching a graduate seminar on the historical sociology of democracy. Based on my own reading of contemporary work by historical sociologists, I have a number of suggestions for possible sessions. Needless to say, all of the issues and some panels would provide a comparative and historical view of the issues and some panels would include research that spans continents and centuries:

"Participatory and Representative Visions of Democracy"
"Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy"
"Liberalism and Democracy: Discourse and Practice"
"Democracy and the Public Sphere"
"Democracy and the Welfare State"
"Citizenship, Gender, and Democracy"
"Alternative Methods for Studying Democratization"
"Trajectories of Democratization"
"Multiculturalism, Racism, and Democracy"
"Democracy, Development, and Dependency"
"Civil Disobedience, Social Movements, and Democracy"

These are only suggestions meant to stimulate discussion and elicit responses from section members who may be working on issues concerning democracy. Given the theme of the Annual Meetings, and the willingness of the current chair of the

Political Sociology section, Jill Quadagno, to cooperate with us in organizing sessions, we should be able to organize more than the three sessions allocated to our section by the program committee. Please help us continue our discussion of plans for the 1993 meeting by writing something for the newsletter, by attending our section business meeting in Pittsburgh, and, if you are unable to attend the 1992 meeting, by sending me your suggestions and comments.

Ron Aminzade

Comparative & Historical Section 1992 ASA Sessions

"Identity Formation in Comparative/Historical Perspective." Organizers: Ann Orloff and Marc Ventresca.

As Calhoun (1991), Zaretsky (1992), and Laslett (1992) contend in diverse ways, comparative and historical attention to issues of identity formation--including the intellectual technologies and patterns of everyday experiences that help make and mobilize identities--is fundamental to understanding not only individual identity, but also that of collectivities (e.g., genders, classes, nations, and professions) and their interrelations. One of the Section sessions at the 1992 meetings highlights these concerns, featuring papers that examine linkages between folk poetry and class identity, comparative evidence on class status and gendered class identity, the differential prevalence of psychology--and notions of a "scientized self"--cross-nationally, and the sources of political identity in relation to democratic transitions. The session is co-sponsored with the Theory Section, which is organizing a related mini-conference at the 1992 meetings, "From Persons to Nations: The Social Constitution of Identities."

The Papers for the session include: Folk Poetry and Working-Class Identity in Northern Ireland," Jane Gray, Yale University; "Is Husband's Class Enough? The Effect of Husband's Class on Women's Working Class Identity in the U.S., Sweden, Norway, and Australia," Janeen Baxter, University of Queensland; "The Scientized Self: Cross-National Variation in the Prevalence of Psychology," David John Frank,

David Miyahara, and John W. Meyer, Stanford University; and "Culture, Power, and Solidarity in the Political Sphere: An Approach to Democratic Transitions," Carlos Forment, Princeton University.

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Calhoun, Craig. 1991. "Chair's Message," in Perspectives: The Theory Section Newsletter, Vol.14, no.1, October, pp.1-2.

Laslett, Barbara. 1992. "Thinking About the Subject." Newsletter of the Comparative and Historical Sociology Section, April.

Zaretsky, Eli. 1992. "A Note on Identity." Newsletter of the Comparative and Historical Sociology Section, Vol.4, no. 2, January, 1992.

Announcements

The Comparative Historical Sociology Teaching Material and Bibliography is being revised and updated for the ASA Teaching Resources Center. The 1987 collection edited by William G. Roy will be expanded to reflect current research and pedagogical developments applicable to undergraduate and graduate teaching of comparative and historical sociology courses. General comparative-historical sociology survey and methods courses, as well as classes focusing on special topics (race, class, gender, economics, politics, culture, demography, cities, etc.), are of interest. Course descriptions and syllabi, class exercises and assignments, research and paper projects, sample exam and study questions, annotated bibliographies and suggested reading lists, information on films, videos, and software as well as other pertinent instructional materials are welcome. The new booklet will be compiled during the summer of 1992. Please send materials to: David A. Smith, Department of Sociology, University of California, Irvine, CA 92717.

Political Sociology Manuscripts Wanted

Manuscripts on the topic of The Future of Socialism are being solicited for a special issue of the Journal of Political and Military Sociology, co-edited by Martin Marger and Marvin Olsen. Papers dealing with any form of socialism (e.g., state socialism, welfare socialism, democratic socialism) are welcome.

Two copies of your manuscript should be sent by 1 September 1992 to: Professor Martin Marger, Department of Sociology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824. The Journal charges a \$10.00 processing fee payable to JPMS, which must accompany your manuscript.

If enough papers of high quality are received, a collection will subsequently be published as a book.