

Situated Lives

Gender and Culture
in Everyday Life

edited by

Louise Lamphere,

Helena Ragoné,

and Patricia Zavella

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ROUTLEDGE
New York and London

Published in 1997 by

Routledge
29 West 35th Street
New York, NY 10001

Published in Great Britain in 1997 by

Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane
London EC4P 4EE

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Printed in the United States of America
Design: Jack Donner

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Situated lives: gender and culture in everyday life / edited by Louise Lamphere, Helena Ragoné, and Patricia Zavella.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-415-91806-5 ISBN 0-415-91807-3 (pbk.)

1. Sex role—Cross-cultural studies. 2. Social change—Cross-cultural studies. 3. United States—Social conditions—1980- 4. Sex role—United States. 5. Feminist anthropology.

I. Lamphere, Louise. II. Ragoné, Helena. III. Zavella, Patricia.

GN479.65.G495 1997

305.3—dc21

96-51900

CIP

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Introduction

LOUISE LAMPHERE, HELENA RAGONÉ,
AND PATRICIA ZAVELLA

This collection brings together the most important recent feminist and critical research illuminating the lived experience of ordinary women and men. The essays we have selected focus on gender and culture, but they also place gender in relation to the historical and material circumstances where gender, race, class, and sexual orientation intersect and shape everyday interaction. Our choices emphasize recent changes in the global economy, capitalism, and postcolonial societies that have transformed families, workplaces, and daily lives. These structural transformations within political economies in turn lead us to reevaluate gender within colonial and postcolonial societies and to examine issues related to representation, conceptions of power, and alternative forms of portraying human agency and resistance. Moreover, these structural transformations accompany new approaches to ethnographic research that lead us to rethink our position as ethnographers engaged in the practice of cultural studies.

We argue that cultural conceptions are being transformed by those who control hegemonic institutions *and* by workers, clients, patients, family members, and citizens affected by these institutions. Equally, we emphasize how material conditions and political realities shape the practices that women and men forge, and we stress the importance of human agency and resistance. Moreover, the decline in funding for research abroad has pushed anthropologists and other ethnographers to turn our attention to pressing contemporary issues in our own society. Many of the transformations that are taking place across the world are also occurring in our own country, making the U. S. an ideal site for the ethnographic study of new cultural and technological processes. For this reason some of the most exciting recent ethnography has been conducted at “home.” Each section of this book includes ethnographies of the U. S. as well as essays examining field research and women’s and men’s lives in developing countries. We use this structure to point out important areas of contrast as well as continuities between the U. S. and the developing world.

Culture

Culture is a concept with a long history in anthropology. The term was originally used by nineteenth-century evolutionists who equated culture with “Civilization” and thought of it as a “complex whole” composed of knowledge, beliefs, and

customs and as a tool for ranking humans from the primitive to the civilized (Tyler [1871] 1958). In the hands of Franz Boas and his students in the early twentieth century, culture was shorn of its evolutionary and racist origins and used to describe the complex patterns of elements, traits, and configurations that constituted the lifeways in separate but equal “cultures.” Departing from this view, Clifford Geertz (1973) suggested that we view culture as the categories, meanings, and values that people use to understand their world. This emphasis shifted attention from the description of bounded cultures to the interpretation of shared meanings in varied contexts, primarily through interpretative writing.

This Geertzian sense of culture and interpretive analysis has become the heart of cultural studies, where literary scholars and specialists in popular culture focus on language and identity and examine the power of representation in contemporary literature, art, performance, or media. Cultural studies scholars theorize about diasporas, emerging discourses, new cultural tropes, and the hybridity of identities that characterize a “postmodern” world. Even though they have adopted the language of cultural anthropology, cultural studies theorists often focus more on power through cultural representation and less on the pragmatics of power or on individual and collective responses to power. Some anthropologists have incorporated interpretation of representation and cultural meaning with an analysis of economic, political, and historical underpinnings to engage a “culture and political economy” approach (di Leonardo 1991). As feminists who see ourselves as part of this perspective, we are interested in the layered meanings of cultural forms, but feel it is also important to understand how culture and historical and social processes *together* affect women’s and men’s lives.

Over the last thirty years, four important processes related to the globalization of capital have shaped cultural meanings on a global scale. First, transnational corporations are increasingly establishing fragmented and dispersed production processes, which in turn require workers to be more mobile. In other words, components are being manufactured in different parts of the world and assembled and marketed elsewhere, while women and men are being forced into an international wage labor force where workers must migrate away from their cultures of origin, often at great cost to their families and their personal lives. Moreover, those who remain in their own countries often produce goods for the world market as more and more products from the third world—everything from illicit drug crops, pharmaceuticals, and rain-forest products like handicraft textiles, rugs, and baskets—are marketed in industrialized countries.

Second and closely related to this globalization of production are new forms of technology, particularly those connected with high-tech electronics; for example, computerization, communication via the Internet or satellite television, and the modernized factory based on automation and robotic technology that contribute to this globalization process. The manufacture of various components of these new high-tech products often occurs in factories in the developing world, while first world managers use them to better find or communicate with far-flung sites of production.

Third, the rapid development of biotechnology has also reshaped the global

market. Examples include reproductive medicine and assisted reproductive technologies (in vitro fertilization, sonograms, ultrasound, amniocentesis, and new forms of birth control), genetics (the Human Genome Project, genetic testing, and gene slicing), and medical approaches to disease (organ donation, AIDS research, and the tracking of deadly viruses). The globalization of biotechnology is evident in the use of diagnostic tests like amniocentesis (a technique to detect birth defects) for sex selection purposes, which in India, for example, has resulted in the abortion of female fetuses. Pharmaceutical firms often export and test products on women in the developing world: in Egypt, the subcutaneous birth control device Norplant has been implanted without the recipients' full knowledge or consent.

Finally, the breakthrough in electronic technology has made possible the increased globalization of media through worldwide computer networks, satellite television circuits, and fiber optic connections. The conglomeration of media industries further contributes to the U. S.'s hegemony in the circulation of film, music, and television, including the creation of media icons. Cultural studies scholars often focus on popular cultural representations emanating from this last set of developments, examining film, rock music, and television. They interpret the power of representation, the multilayered nature of texts, and the translatability of images, at the expense of discussing the material relations and economic forces making possible these cultural representations and creating new forms of power. In borrowing anthropological concepts (like culture) and critiques of anthropological writing (see Marcus and Fischer 1986), cultural studies scholars often ignore anthropologists' emphasis on the political/economic contexts in which cultural meanings and ethnographic texts are created.

Second-wave feminists and critical anthropologists have expanded our view about writing and interpretation, suggesting that we see theories as historically constructed and embedded in political, social, and cultural contexts. We now question the nature of our relationship to our subjects and examine the way in which our writing reflects the power relations embedded in the research setting. This self-critical and reflexive approach has produced innovative research, experimental writing, and attention to culture in relation to history, economic analysis, and political critique.

The new anthropological approach, the one that informs our own research and the essays in this collection, recognizes the inextricable connection of culture to politics, economics, and history. Events like the collapse of the iron curtain make ever more clear the naivete in treating culture as timeless and bounded. Despite the boundaries imposed by race, ethnicity, nation, work, or family, men and women construct cultural meanings in their everyday lives which interconnect these domains. This collection highlights these interconnections and points to new ways of thinking about culture.

Gender

The analysis of gender is crucial for understanding recent global processes and the importance of culture in everyday lived experience. The globalization of capital, transnational production, biotechnology, and the internationalization of media are

all gendered: all four affect the lives of women and men in both common and different ways. While women and men may view these processes out of disparate sets of experiences, their location within the same institutional and social structures produces overlapping experience on the basis of such structural commonalities as class position, national identity, and racial status.

When feminist anthropologists first examined gender, the focus was on an “Anthropology of Women,” exploring the nature of women’s lives that had been hidden from view in traditional ethnographies and in anthropological theory as well. A handful of important ethnographies of the late 1950s through the 1970s focused on women’s lives in an attempt to make up for the lack of research on women in earlier decades (see Fernea 1969; Murphy and Murphy 1974; Strathern 1972; Weiner 1976; Wolf 1968). While this research was much needed and long overdue, it became increasingly clear that we could not just “add women’s voices” to our ethnographic texts. Any formulation about women had to include men, since gender is socially constructed and produced relationally (Rubin 1975, 1984; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Collier and Yanagisako 1987). These relations are now understood to be constituted within a cultural, economic, and political system that is also historically situated. Such systems involve race, ethnicity, class, and other forms of inequality that must be integrally incorporated into any gender analysis. Moreover, sexuality and gender are intimately connected to the social construction of race and political economy (Lancaster and di Leonardo 1997). Whether we are talking about volatile political issues like abortion, new reproductive technologies (in vitro fertilization or surrogacy), or colonialism, notions about sex, gender, and the proper relationship between gendered/sexed and racialized individuals are all part of powerful cultural constructions that shape human interaction.

In selecting these essays, we have drawn on a culture *and* political-economy perspective, integrating the analysis of cultural meanings with a dissection of political issues and material realities. Gender is historically contingent and constructed, simultaneously embedded in material relations, social institutions, and cultural meanings. Finally, gender is intimately bound up with inequalities, not only in the often dominant relation of men to women but also to those of class and race (di Leonardo 1991, 28–32). Some essays in this book focus primarily on cultural constructions of gender while others emphasize the economic forces shaping gender relations, but taken as whole, the collection integrates both approaches to analyze changing gender configurations.

Practice, Agency, and Resistance

Beginning in the 1980s, many anthropologists embraced a “practice approach” to explicate the relation between cultural meanings and material realities. Integral to this approach is the notion of “praxis,” a term borrowed from Marx: “The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and human activity or self-changing can only be grasped and rationally understood as revolutionary practice. . . . All social life is essentially practical. All the mysteries which lead theory towards mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and the comprehension of this practice” (Marx [1845] 1964, 68–69).

More recently other formulations inspired the current focus on practice. Bourdieu (1977, 78) suggested the concept of “habitus”—structured dispositions that are put into action through concrete practices—while Giddens (1979, 71) argued for a theory of structuration or a mutual dependence of agency and structure that emphasizes “situated practices.” Ortner (1989, 12) summarized this new concept when she wrote: “Practice is action considered in relation to structure: that is, in contrast with the position taken in ‘symbolic interactionism,’ say, structure is not bracketed analytically, but is central to the analysis of action or practice itself. Practice emerges from structure, it reproduces structure, and it has the capacity to transform structure.” Furthermore, Ortner added that “it is only in historical contexts that one can see the relationship between practice and structure fully played out” (Ortner 1989, 12).

In *Woman, Culture and Society*, feminist anthropologists offered the precursor of practice anthropology. Jane Collier (1974) argued for viewing women’s agency, while others (Wolf 1974; Lamphere 1974) stressed the importance of different interests among women. As feminist anthropologists began to study gender, more attention was given to women in different positions within the same society (wives, widows, lineage sisters, rural rather than town-dwelling peasant women) and in relation to different categories of men (see Bourque and Warren 1981; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Sacks 1979). Furthermore, the variation among women within the same category—their individual voices as well as the strategies they forged vis-à-vis bosses, husbands, male lineage heads, or ritual practitioners—became central to feminist anthropological analysis (Abu-Lughod 1993; di Leonardo 1984; Lamphere et al. 1992; Sacks 1988; Zavella 1987). The feminist ethnographers in this collection combine strands of both practice theory and a culture and political-economy approach.

In many ways we are borrowing from Donna Haraway’s notion of “situated knowledges,” a feminist epistemological stance that privileges the historicized and social location of the writer, where knowledge is always partial but also embedded in the differing visions of active subjects (Haraway 1991, 183–201; see also Rosaldo 1989; Behar and Gordon 1995). We view our own knowledge as critical feminist ethnographers as partial and situated, and, in analyzing women’s and men’s lives, we view our subjects as positioned actors who forge “situated knowledges” in order to act within their material circumstances.

It is not surprising, then, that the emphasis on practice and situated knowledges leads feminist anthropologists to reexamine our relationships with our subjects, with the process of fieldwork itself, and with the nature of ethnographic writing. This questioning reveals that ethnography is not only deeply gendered but is also situated within relations of power and subordination. The anthropologist’s own positionality is multidimensional and changing, depending on context and historical circumstance. For these reasons, it is important to begin our discussion of culture, gender, and ethnographic practice within the debates concerning the practice of ethnography.

Originating in Marxism, practice also carries a more overt political meaning, where active human subjects respond to the conditions in which they live and construct alternatives. Feminist anthropologists are concerned with how women

resist subordination through their activities in everyday life, whether in renouncing the cultural prescriptions that control their bodies or rejecting pejorative self-perceptions. This book considers how some women and men resist by developing a critical consciousness regarding the constraints of social life as they confront individuals, institutional agents, development projects, or powerful discourses, and how others, the more activist-oriented, create collectivities that change their social worlds.

The Power of Representation: Gendered Ethnography in Practice

The first section of the book deals with the initial boundary any observer of everyday practice must confront—that between the Self and the Other, between the investigator/writer and the women and men with whom she interacts, observes, and interviews. In the 1960s, anthropologists began to examine the nature of field research, writing about the politics of relationships with field assistants and informants and about the roles anthropologists assumed in the communities they studied (Golde 1970; Hymes 1969; Weaver 1973). Jean Briggs's *Never in Anger* (1970) and Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977) placed the authors in narratives about the field situation itself, highlighting their interactions with a variety of others.

Feminist ethnographers question whether anthropology can or should be constructed differently when feminists study women (Abu-Lughod 1990; Stacey 1988). Stacey stresses the potentially manipulative aspects of the feminist/subject relationship and is deeply skeptical about the possibilities of a feminist ethnography. In a similar vein, Marilyn Strathern (1987) takes a negative position and asserts that the problem of feminist ethnography lies in the somewhat uneasy or ambivalent relation between feminism and anthropology, since each mocks the way the contrasting discipline conceives of the Self/Other dichotomy.

Abu-Lughod, on the other hand, argues for a feminist ethnography that works “with the assumption of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and an other that is also partly the self” (1990, 25). Abu-Lughod suggests that feminist anthropology disrupts boundaries, brings to light what it means to be a woman in other places with different conditions, and replaces the presumption of a female experience with a grounded sense of our commonalities and differences (1990, 27).

From our point of view, ethnographies written by feminists and other critical anthropologists pose several important dilemmas, including: How can we, as ethnographers, convey the nuances of our status as both outsiders and insiders—relations that exist even when we come from the same class, ethnic background, or community as our subjects? How can we alter the power relations between ethnographers and their subjects when we frame the topic for study and the questions asked and receive professional benefits from the publication of our results? And how can we write about our subjects without objectifying them? Although we cannot ever completely solve these dilemmas, as the essays in this section demonstrate, we can create new fieldwork practices and writing strategies that will help mitigate them.

Kirin Narayan's “How Native is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” addresses an impor-

tant issue that many anthropologists must confront: their identity. In this essay, Narayan deconstructs her own status as a “native” anthropologist, showing us the multiple identities inherent in her American mother’s and Indian father’s past. She argues that she is regarded differently (as a visiting kinswoman, a “foreigner,” and a foreign academic with dubious motives) at different times and in varied contexts during her field research in India.

Patricia Zavella’s “Feminist Insider Dilemmas: Constructing Ethnic Identity with ‘Chicana’ Informants” grapples with the conundrum that researchers are simultaneously insiders and outsiders. Here Zavella shows that only when she deconstructing her own Chicana feminism could she “hear” that her informants were not Chicanas like herself, but were working-class women who used a variety of self-identifying terms, including Mexicana, Mexican-American, Spanish, or even Tex-Mex. She argues that a “self-reflexive analysis of our own experience will push us to provide ‘provisional’ analyses that are always incomplete, but which make clear whose viewpoint is being represented.”

José Limón’s “*Carne, Carnales*, and the Carnavalesque: Bakhtinian *Batos*, Disorder, and Narrative Discourses” confronts another dilemma: the power of representation. His contestation of pejorative representations of working-class Mexicanos reveals his own access to power. Here Limón narrates a story by a college dropout (a man attending a *carne asada* and farewell party for Limón) that pokes fun at the male anthropologist and thereby suggests that we can never erase class (and ethnic or gender) differences, but that we can “decenter our own narrative of self-assurance lest it be saturated with dominating power.”

The essays in this section and throughout the collection demonstrate ways of writing that do not objectify our subjects. These include presenting women’s voices in detail, paying attention to the variety among women’s situations (rather than presenting one universal type of experience), and historically contextualizing ethnographic material. These writing strategies, along with the inclusion of the ethnographer within the narrative and an analysis of the anthropologist’s position (the decentering Limón proposes), move anthropology toward creating more dialogic rather than objectifying accounts.

Reproducing the Body: Reshaping Conception and Birth

The essays in this section focus on women’s bodies, and thereby contribute to one of the most exciting, expanding, and innovative areas of feminist research. Together they explicate the ways in which the analysis of cultural meanings and the attention to women’s agency and practice are intertwined. Feminists have argued that reproduction, with its locus in women’s bodies, is “inextricably bound up with the production of culture” (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995, 2), with world views and cosmology (Delaney 1986, 495), and with concepts of personhood and the production of knowledge (Strathern 1991, 1992c). The essays here take up different aspects of culture as well as the cultural reconfiguration of reproduction.

Emily Martin’s “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles” shows how the traditional narrative about the sperm fertilizing the egg recapitulates gender stereotypes.

Martin notes how the egg is either portrayed as the “damsel in distress,” “the hard to get prize” (both passive metaphors), or a female aggressor who “captures and tethers the sperm,” while the sperm is active, mobile, and penetrating.

Assisted reproductive technologies have led to interesting reconceptualizations of reproduction beyond this fable. As Sarah Franklin points out in “Making Sense of Missed Conceptions,” for those involved in assisted reproduction (a whole array of techniques designed to help infertile couples) conception can no longer be seen as “natural” so much as an “obstacle course.” In this context, each stage of conception is broken down into further stages, with “more hurdles to overcome and more things that can eventually go wrong.” Martin and Franklin illustrate how medical discourses which are thought to be objective are imbued with potent cultural meanings.

Surrogate motherhood, as analyzed by Helena Ragoné in “Surrogate Mothers, Adoptive Mothers, and Fathers,” also reveals the remolding and reshaping of cultural meanings surrounding reproduction. Surrogates and adoptive mothers often ignore the class divisions between those who can afford surrogacy (affluent couples) and those who bear the child (working-class women) by culturally dividing the birth process. Surrogates are seen as “biological mothers,” while adoptive mothers are seen as the “social mothers,” a cultural restructuring of the notion of maternal nurturance that privileges social motherhood.

In contrast, Right-to-Life activists described in Faye Ginsburg’s essay, “The ‘Word-Made’ Flesh: The Disembodiment of Gender in the Abortion Debate,” use more traditional notions of nurturance. They ally pro-choice women with destructive, decadent, and usually male sexuality, while portraying women who undergo unwanted pregnancies as “truly female,” because they engage in “a heroic act in which a woman’s capacity for nurturance has been tested.” Both Ragoné and Ginsburg demonstrate that notions like nurturance are historically contingent and can be strategically transformed by women to deal with different reproductive dilemmas.

Rayna Rapp’s study, “Constructing Amniocentesis: Maternal and Medical Discourses,” finds that through Medicaid and the city’s health department working-class Black and Hispanic women in New York City have access to the same prenatal diagnosis technologies as white, middle-class women. In addition to creating their own discourses concerning a positive amniocentesis diagnosis, they engage in a variety of practices in seeking support and making a decision to carry the fetus to term or have an abortion. White, middle-class women often accept medical discourse, while Black women use dreams, alternative healers, and kin as resources to interpret the meaning of their pregnancies, and Latinas often invoke religious imagery and stress maternal sacrifices.

The strategic shaping of cultural meanings leads us to the important role of agency, a central concern in a practice approach to reproduction. Who has access to various forms of birth control or reproductive technologies is one of the most important issues in this literature. As Iris Lopez’s essay, “Agency and Constraint: Sterilization and Reproductive Freedom Among Puerto Rican Women in New York City,” demonstrates, working-class women of color exercise agency within the context of a powerful set of constraints. Since Puerto Rican women are given limited information about other means of birth control, and they shoulder the burden of

family fertility management, sterilization represents a means of maintaining control over their own reproduction and a way of improving the quality of their lives. Rather than seeing these women as victims or as simply manipulated by the medical establishment, Lopez stresses the ways that their decisions “make sense” and invites us to look at the systemic changes that would make it possible for Puerto Rican women to make other “choices.”

Selections by Ginsburg and Rapp attend to cultural constructions and emphasize agency in the same analysis. Right-to-Life definitions of the fetus as a life to be saved and a clinic patient as a woman to be counseled are embedded in concrete practices. Right-to-Life activists staged prayer vigils outside abortion clinics, attempted “sidewalk counseling” with clinic patients, and established a “problem pregnancy” center that was designed to persuade women to consider alternatives to abortion. Pro-life activists shore up and sharpen their commitment to a set of cultural conceptions through these concrete rituals and actions. For women involved in surrogacy relationships, there were also important practices that solidified the radically new cultural concepts mentioned above. Adoptive mothers “bond” with their surrogates when they shop for baby clothes and attend childbirth classes and medical appointments together and, of course, when they are present at the birth (along with the father and the surrogate’s husband).

All of these essays show how feminist ethnographers represent gendered cultural constructions about the body, and how women and men display historical agency through the everyday practices of reproduction.

Constructing Family: Creating Household and Community

Just as reproductive technology is shaping alternative notions of family, changes in the U. S. economy have fueled a vast transformation of family structures at home and in developing countries. In the period after World War II, the expansion of the U. S. economy propelled the building of suburbs, the growth of well-paying union jobs (particularly for men), and a rise in working-class and middle-class consumerism. After a sharp post-war rise, divorce rates decreased and birth rates rose, creating the “baby boom” and a cultural emphasis on the nuclear family—the father as provider and the mother as homemaker. This contrasted with earlier patterns where nuclear families were part of neighborhood or small-town networks of kin; the suburban, isolated nuclear family was a historically new pattern (Coontz 1992, 25–29).

This new situation contained contradictions, however, and even in the 1950s there were cracks in the idealized picture of American families. A full 25 percent of families were living below the poverty line, and people of color were excluded from white suburban affluence. Beneath the veneer of a nation of happy, homogeneous nuclear families, there were indications of sexual abuse, child battering, alcoholism, and stressful marriages (Coontz 1992, 29–37). “A successful 1950s family was often achieved at enormous costs to the wife, who was expected to subordinate her own needs and aspirations to those of both her husband and her children” (Coontz 1992, 36). Betty Friedan labeled women’s malaise as the “problem that has no name” in her bestseller *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).

A series of economic transformations beginning in the early 1960s created new family patterns and again brought to light the class, racial, and ethnic differences in family organization that had been suppressed in 1950s ideology. Black migration to the North, which began in the nineteenth century, accelerated during World War II, and continued into the 1960s, was fueled by changes in southern agriculture that forced 3.5 million African Americans off the land and into northern cities (Stack 1974, 1). In 1974–75, and again in 1982–83 and 1992–93, the U. S. suffered a severe recession. These three economic downturns were part of the globalization of production and the restructuring of the American economy that continue to the present. During each recession, manufacturing plants were relocated to the American South and West and to the Third World. At first light industries like apparel, textiles, toys, and shoes were affected, but during the early 1980s, rubber, steel, and auto manufacturing also declined precipitously. Over a half million jobs were lost in the first two recessions (Bluestone and Harrison 1982, 25–26).

This began a period of irreversible structural unemployment (where the U. S. tolerated relatively high rates of joblessness and a decline in men's labor force participation). As high-paying male jobs disappeared, new jobs were created in the service sector, many of them low-paying "Macjobs"—after McDonald's, the epitome of low-wage, high-turnover positions (Garson 1988). Workers have become more productive, but inflation during the 1980s and stagnant incomes during the 1990s have meant that inflation-adjusted incomes have fallen since 1972. Women's labor force participation rose to a high of 58 percent in 1993, while men's declined to 75 percent. For women of childbearing age, labor force participation increased to 75 percent in 1993. High unemployment rates and stagnating wages also brought half a million African American men and women back to the South by 1990. Many returned to their home places of "persistent poverty" where people feel an obligation to help their kin or redeem a lost community (Stack, this volume). Declining family incomes produced more working women and the trend toward dual-worker families, while higher divorce rates and high unemployment rates increased the proportion of single-parent families to 31 percent of all families by 1994 (U. S. Census Bureau 1994). In the midst of these structural transformations, lesbian mothers challenged the very idea of the family by creating households of their own with children from their prior heterosexual marriages or artificial insemination, or they constructed "blended families" with their partners and their children.

Added to the restructuring of the American economy and increasing unemployment has been the rising cost of urban housing, the gentrification of inner cities (see Williams 1992), and the dismantling of state-funded safety nets such as institutional care for the mentally ill. These factors have contributed to the rise in domestic violence rates, divorce, and the feminization of poverty and have created a new population of homeless: women and children (Liebow 1993). Families and individuals, then, are forced to rely on neighbors, kin, friends, or community-based organizations to cope with the effects of these social problems.

The economic forces pressing on Third World families are even greater, due to the impact of structural adjustment policies on developing countries. In response to high levels of debt, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forced countries to