



The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 30
Issue 3 *September*

Article 20

September 2003

Practicing Sociology: Selected Fields. Robert A. Dentler.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2003) "*Practicing Sociology: Selected Fields.* Robert A. Dentler," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 3 , Article 20.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol30/iss3/20>

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



constitute the majority of prostitution. Although these women are the most likely to be noticed by the public, arrested and labeled as criminal, their activities make up only a small amount of the actual industry. They do however make up the bulk of the public image of prostitution. Also, in many cases prostitutes are dismissed from public policy formation because they have been the victims of childhood sexual abuse or other forms of sexual assault. These already stigmatized women are further marginalized because they have been the victims of crime.

Most of the book is dedicated to the current state of prostitution policy. Kuo discusses such concepts as the relationship between heterosexual activity and prostitution, heterosexual and homosexual prostitution, the conceptual constructs of sexuality and prostitution, the ideal character of intercourse and prostitution and the current legal status and policy of the sex industry. These topics are carefully fleshed out to describe prostitution as it is currently practiced. The feminist framework in which this information is presented might be quite revolutionary to those that do not ordinarily engender that perspective. The book ends with a chapter on solutions to the current issue through policy recommendations. In general, it can be deduced from Kuo recommendations that she espouses a stance that decriminalizes prostitution, yet regulates its practice.

This book is well written and covers an important, controversial topic from a previously under-explored perspective. It is well organized and might serve well as an excellent resource in a special topics course on prostitution. The language can be technical, especially in the methods and policy recommendations section, therefore it may not be as readily understood by the non-academic public. There are sections where the author indicates that it might be useful for most readers to skip over, unless truly interested in the methodology. In general however this is an interesting and enlightening read on one of today's hottest topics.

Robert A. Dentler, *Practicing Sociology: Selected Fields*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002. \$22.95 papercover.

Sociologists have historically been divided on the question of social and political engagement. While some have consistently argued for a value free sociology that avoids engagement of this kind, others have urged sociologists to generate knowledge for

the explicit purpose of improving the social world. Proponents of the value free approach contend that it is not the task of sociologists to influence society and its institutions. Indeed, they argue, to do so risks tainting sociology's objectivity and concern with establishing truth. On the other hand, proponents of applied sociology claim that these concerns are exaggerated. It is possible, they argue, to undertake theoretical and empirical work of social relevance without adopting partisan positions.

These arguments have raged ever since sociology first emerged as a discipline in the 19th century. Comte, who is widely regarded as the first writer to popularize the term 'sociology' was an avid proponent of applied sociology. But even those who were more cautious such as Durkheim and Weber believed that sociological knowledge could be used by policy makers and others to bring about social improvements. It is timely, therefore, that the whole issue of applied sociology should be brought to the attention of students in an informative and helpful way. Dentler's book makes a major contribution to understanding and promoting applied sociology.

Dentler reviews the rich history of sociology as an applied field and explains the social, political, and economic changes that influenced it. He explains the tension between those who see the purpose of sociology as one of knowledge development and those interested in using this knowledge to improve social conditions. The second half of the book provides a detailed review of sociological practice in different arenas including participatory action research, organizations, work and labor relations, education, and evaluation. By showing how sociological ideas can be applied to these fields of endeavor, Dentler makes a major contribution.

In addition to setting the discussion in historical context, another strength of the book is the extent to which it links theory in each of the fields of practice to interventions. This use of theory is not only commendable in its own right but makes it useful to all professionals who practice in these fields, not only sociologists. Social workers reading the book will be struck by similarities between the approaches discussed and social work practice, particularly collaborative and empowerment practice. This is not to say that sociological practice does not offer a distinct and valuable contribution to social intervention. Rather, the one

criticism that could be made of this book is that it ignores research undertaken outside sociology in explicitly applied fields such as social work. By transcending its own disciplinary boundaries, the book could have explored relationships between sociologists and others who contribute to the wider task of making the world a better place. Nevertheless, this is an excellent book that should be widely prescribed in sociology classes and in other fields as well.

Barbara Melosh, *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. \$29.95 hardcover.

In *Strangers and Kin*, Barbara Melosh provides a historical account of adoption in the United States. Whereas other books on adoption focus on the needs of children or on specific aspects of the adoption experience, she presents the overarching concept and how society's view of and agencies' policy toward adoption have changed throughout the 20th Century. Instead of a child-focused adoption book, Melosh is primarily concerned with the experiences of birth mothers and adoptive parents and she shows how their experiences reflect American society's views and the social issues surrounding adoption.

Strangers and Kin is organized as a timeline of adoption themes emerging during different parts of the century. Beginning with the crafting of more formalized adoptions in the 1920s–40s, the book continues through the 1990s addressing issues of adoption matching, transracial adoptions (both domestic and international), society's morality and its effect on birth mother relinquishments, adoption disclosure and non-disclosure, and the push for more openness in adoption. Within these main themes, Melosh intersperses topics such as adoptability assessments of children, religious matching, birth parents' rights and economic considerations.

One impressive accomplishment of this book is Melosh's ability to present a vast amount of information in an organized, lively and memorable manner. Her inclusion of case record narratives allows the reader a greater sense of adoption as experienced by the adoptive family, the birth mother and the social worker. Drawing primarily from records of the Children's Bureau of Delaware, Melosh includes case examples that bring to life her descrip-