Objectifying Measures: The Dominance of High-Stakes Testing and the Politics of Schooling

Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews 2011 40: 110
DOI: 10.1177/0094306110392157k

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://csx.sagepub.com/content/40/1/110

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:
American Sociological Association

Additional services and information for Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://csx.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts
Subscriptions: http://csx.sagepub.com/subscriptions
Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav
Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

>> Version of Record - Jan 6, 2011

What is This?
BRIEFLY NOTED


In Power Politics Karen Brodkin analyzes the successful mobilization of environmental justice activists against the construction of a power plant South Gate, a community in southeastern Los Angeles County. The historical and geographical context of the study is quite important considering that the mobilization took place during a major energy shortage throughout California. As such, Power Politics provides an engaging account of successful mobilization during a period of lowered political opportunities. Brodkin draws from a wide variety of informants, including activists, power plant representatives, and local politicians. Her analysis is also grounded in participant observation of community and city council meetings. The work addresses the history of the racial dynamics of the South Gate community, the history of the environmental justice movement in the community, and an analysis of how support and opposition to the power plant developed. Brodkin particularly emphasizes the development of environmental justice activism by South Gate High School students and teachers, who were key players in the mobilization against the plant. Finally, Brodkin analyzes the activities and strategies of the plants’ supporters and opponents during the struggle over whether to build the plant.

Scholars of social movements and collective behavior will find many valuable insights in this work. Brodkin’s explicit focus on the impact of class and race on environmental organization may also be of interest to those studying social stratification, race, environmental racism, as well as their interactions.


With 139 individuals declared innocent and released from death row since 1973, Cathleen Burnett’s examination of the concept of innocence in capital cases is a timely addition to the growing scholarship on the death penalty in the United States. In Wrongful Death Sentences, Burnett offers a sobering critique of the criminal justice procedures used to adjudicate guilt in capital cases. In doing so, she lays out the theoretical foundation for an expansive conception of innocence which includes actual innocence (the offender did not commit the crime), factual innocence (the offender was an accomplice but not the actual killer), and legal innocence (there are justifiable reasons for committing the killing).

Meticulously citing case law and relevant research, Burnett devotes a chapter to each of these conceptions to highlight the flaws in capital sentencing, including elicitation of false confessions, the suppression of mitigating factors by prosecutors, and Supreme Court decisions that limit appeals. In most chapters, there is an in-depth analysis of a specific case which illustrates both the complexity of capital cases and how the practices of various actors in the justice system can produce wrongful convictions. Moreover, whereas much of the literature on capital punishment describes shortcomings in its functioning, Burnett goes further by offering policy recommendations that would help ensure fairness, equality, and prevent future wrongful death sentences. General audiences and students in sociology, criminology, and law will find this text interesting and useful, especially those interested in understanding how the criminal justice system can produce wrongful death sentences.
Many Americans across all ethnic and racial groups have characterized Asian Americans as the “model minority.” This label serves as an example for blacks and Hispanics who continually strive for the upward mobility that Asians experience in education, socioeconomic status, and occupational attainment. While this “model minority” status often carries positive connotations, Rosalind Chou and Joe Feagin in *The Myth of the Model Minority* argue that this “model minority” label does not mean that Asians are free from racial hostility and discrimination. Through revealing interviews with forty-three Asian Americans, Chou and Feagin remind readers that racism and discrimination toward Asians (and people of color in general) is very much prevalent and detrimental to Asians today.

The authors offer compelling anecdotal evidence of the impact of white racism on Asian Americans. They describe the heavy price Asian Americans pay in securing their American Dream: relatively high rates of suicide and depression. However, the “model minority” tag allows the public to dismiss or ignore these alarming statistics. In addition, the authors argue that Asian Americans must reject their Asian culture and background in order to obtain success in white dominated institutions. Regardless of their success, Chou and Feagin contend that Asian Americans will always be the “other” and are subsequently “forever foreign.” Personal accounts of racial discrimination and hostility illustrate Asian Americans’ struggle to feel, conform to, and resist racial ideologies that whites have created. Moreover, the authors demonstrate the lose-lose circumstance that Asian Americans experience: they either fail to live up to their “model minority” status and are subsequently labeled “inferior” or they live up to stereotypical expectations and are consequently classified as “nerds” or “geeks.”

Most importantly, this book brings to light the marginalization and subordination of Asian Americans as an issue that demands visibility and attention. Additionally, this book offers descriptive detail in the variety of explicit and implicit ways that whites subjugate people of color. This analysis of racial discrimination experienced by Asian Americans is useful for graduate students and researchers who desire further insight into the dynamics of diversity in contemporary America.

Juan Cole’s work succeeds in demystifying the current state of international relations between the Islamic nations of continental Asia and the Western World without falling back on the tired clash of civilizations rhetoric that has dominated much of the recent conversation. Cole’s writing style, moving seamlessly back and forth between detailed personal narratives and thoughtful political analysis provides wide ranging appeal to the literary audience. Unlike other work in this field, his writing style will leave non-academics feeling like they have just had a deep conversation with a person who has lived a life of meaningful exchanges with the Muslim world, with a smattering of facts used to drive home points; academics will find this work reads like a well constructed seminar on Muslim-Western relations, driven by thoughtful analysis, with a smattering of personal stories used to keep the audience involved.

Cole’s work understands the conflagration of economic, political, religious forces driving the current Muslim world, primarily focusing on mainland Asia. While organizing these forces into sections of the book, he never forgets the inseparable nature of these forces. People interested in policy analysis, contemporary Middle Eastern history, religious interaction in both conflict and cooperation areas, terrorism, and the economics of conflict will find this book informative. Some of the analysis is particularly time sensitive which may detract from the effectiveness of the text in years to come. While the subject matter and depth of analysis occasionally straddle the line between
undergraduate and graduate level understanding, this text brings a new, and personally informed, point of view to the conversation, without the ideological baggage that often accompanies such literary voices.


As the threat of terrorist activity continues to remain a salient feature of many societies, research into the causes and consequences of terrorism has increased dramatically. However, this research has taken on a variety of forms which focus upon distinct features of the issue, ranging from the social-psychological to the macro-economic. _Terrorism, Instability, and Democracy in Asia and Africa_, by David G. Cox, John Falconer, and Brian Stackhouse, provides an excellent synthesis of existing multi-faceted terrorism research, with emphasis on the previously underexplored regions of Asia and Africa.

With a focus on the links between democracy/democratization and terrorism, an approach that is at the center of debate among political scientists, this book provides a wealth of information on the phenomenon of Asian and African terrorist activity that includes data from both statistical analysis and case studies. Providing a clearly stated methodology and theoretical approach, the book demarcates between domestic and international terrorism, and proceeds to investigate specific regions (Southeast Asia, Northern Africa, etc.) which are included in their analysis. The authors also offer thoughtful policy prescriptions to address some of the hypothesized root causes of terrorist activity. Because of this, the book should be of value to students and academics with an interest in international affairs, international comparative work, and terrorism research, or anyone with a general interest in the growing field of terrorism studies.

Exploring the various ways both they and their scholarship fall “between” traditional definitions of academic work, which the authors suggest has origins in colonialist discourses, Marcelo Diversi and Claudio Moreira set about establishing a scholarly means of uniting indigenous knowledge with a variety of critical approaches to academic work. In so doing, they attempt to reinstate the missing voice of indigenous peoples to scholarly discourses and thus recapture the nuances of their lived experiences. To accomplish this reconciliation, the authors establish themselves as “betweener”—persons who are “(un)conscious bodies experiencing life in and between two cultures” (p. 19). Further, they suggest that the “betweenness” that results from living life in more than one culture is a point of commonality amongst all human beings since marginalization is a universal experience. By understanding the many manifestations of this betweenness, we gain a greater appreciation of localized, personalized knowledge.

Chapter One provides an extended treatment of the concept of betweenness, its relationship to the authors’ agenda of intellectual and geographical boundary crossing, and the personal origins of this book. Chapter Two provides a brief overview of the authors’ autoethnographic, performative, and narrative methodologies. This methodological discussion is taken up again in Chapter Nine, which explores the negotiation of identity, and Chapter Ten, which examines directions for future research and the application of the authors’ methodological and theoretical constructs. Chapters Three through Eight explore various social manifestations of betweenness—taking up identity, class, race, sexuality, indigenousness, and epistemological issues in turn. Through this exploration, Diversi and Moreira suggest a number of boundaries we might seek to cross as scholars: the personal and the intellectual, scholarship and practice, and indigenous and

Mobile Methodologies is a collection of innovative examples of research. In the introduction, the editors justify the need for research on mobility, and point out that most research methods focus on a specific point in time (e.g., the day of the interview, the frame of reference of survey responses). However, real life is not lived in specific moments; it is lived in continuous time. By failing to account for this movement through time and space, the editors argue that we miss potentially important factors. The variety of pieces featured in the text study units of analysis including pedestrians, passengers in cars, drivers, cyclists, physical movement of the body (e.g., through dance).

The authors very clearly introduce methods for studying mobility, and innovations to existing methods that make it possible to study mobility. All of the methods discussed and used in this book are clearly explained and require no previous knowledge to understand. Some of the featured research combines multiple methods (e.g., a video recording accompanied by an in-person interview while watching the video play back). Photos and video screen captures also help to illustrate what is being studied. Moreover, the authors state that, “. . . this volume is intended to be a starting point” (p. 169), and encourage additional research focusing on mobility and using innovative methods.

This text would be very useful in either a graduate or undergraduate research methods course because it provides examples of innovative research and uses both quantitative and qualitative data to answer specific research questions. This text would also be of interest to researchers who study the physical environment of public space.


In this text, Jacqui Gabb highlights the methodological and theoretical challenges and advances in the study of intimacy among
“families.” Gabb begins this text by introducing the reader to some of the definitional difficulties in the study of intimacy as well as providing an overview of the pilot study from which many examples in the book are derived. Some of these ideas are revisited later, when theoretical conceptualizations of intimacy are considered. As Gabb details, it is critical for research in this area to move beyond the study of the family as a structural unit. Rather, focus should be placed on the everyday interactions that create and maintain our socially-constructed notions of family. Further, it is also important to make clear what we mean when we use the term “intimacy.” To construe intimacy as somehow equivalent to sexuality or sexual identity is to neglect layers of intimacy that are quite meaningful to a study of the family.

Throughout this text, Gabb uses existing research as well as findings from a pilot study of families in England to demonstrate these and other intricacies of researching intimacy in a family context. In the second and third chapters, the book focuses on ethical and methodological concerns as well as providing background on the academic fields that inform the study of intimacy. Using examples from the pilot study, much of the remainder of the text examines the contributions of various methodological techniques and theoretical constructs to the study of intimacy within the family. Geared towards researchers studying families and relationships, Researching Intimacy in Families is a thought-provoking introduction to intimacy in families, providing necessary background as well as suggestions for future research in this area.


Clark Glymour’s new book Galileo In Pittsburgh presents a series of vignettes on the nature of applied science and practical policy. The book is broken into three sections focusing on different areas of practical research—“Education,” “The Environment,” and “Science?” Noting that today’s science is fundamentally different from that of previous centuries, the book explores issues of trust, misunderstanding, and uncertainty that emerge from an increasingly complex world data and computation. Glymour begins with a demarcation between “paradigms,” in the Kuhnian sense, and “bandwagons,” their “evil alter ego.” The praise of Kuhn and his importance continues throughout the work, including traditional critiques of Popper, and the terms, implicitly and explicitly, serve to structure much of what is deemed good or bad science.

At the heart of the book, both literally and emotionally, rests an imagined conversation between Glymour and his late father-in-law on the subject of climate change, a research paradigm in Glymour’s estimation. The brief chapter summarizes, with remarkable efficacy, many of the arguments both for and against climate change research and its possible effects on public policy. Another chapter recounts the University of Pittsburgh’s formal inquiry into Herbert Needleman’s work on lead poisoning, one moral of which, that “justice is not done when sensible scientists are tried by untenable standards, any more than it was in the seventeenth century” (p. 64) serves as the source of the book’s title. Other chapters include a discussion on the teaching of creationism, a cautionary tale on unintended consequences illustrated through Thomas Midgley Jr.’s discovery of leaded gasoline and chlorofluorocarbons, and the purported bad science of Sigmund Freud, among others.

Covering an immense range of topics and written in a witty, precise language that makes no effort to hide Glymour’s preconceptions, Galileo In Pittsburgh is a fast-paced, short, fun book that raises important questions on the shifting nature of modern science.


Stephen Gundle’s Glamour develops a concrete description for a term that, by nature, contains an element of je ne sais quoi. While glamour is more about perception than substance in Gundle’s account, the cultural role of glamour has been quite substantial during
the past two centuries in shaping taste and developing aesthetics with notable social implications in Gundle’s countries of focus—Britain, France, the United States and Italy. Gundle begins his book in France, defining the origins of glamour, which is, for him, a strictly modern phenomenon. He contrasts Marie Antionette’s use of excess, one of personal privilege, with Napoléon, who used public excess as a tool of political authority. Gundle argues that glamour deliberately encourages popular imitation to reinforce the status of those who embody glamour—something Napoleon employed to compensate for a non-noble heritage and the essential engine for those seeking to be arbiters of taste in society ever since—as well as for those interested in profiting from this process. Gundle’s glamour is close kin to consumerism, rising in tandem with consumer culture. Glamour compels the mass consumer to covet the life of wealth and exclusivity while offering a glimmer of its attainability; life narratives of glamorous people often have a rags-to-riches element. Thus, products associated with glamorous people allow the masses to feel a proximity to exclusive lifestyles, even if such a lifestyle can never be achieved realistically.

In Gundle’s post-Napoleonic historical review of glamour, its arbiters are increasingly stylists, particularly fashion designers, as often as those who are actually being styled. While the faces of glamour change—Greta Garbo, Princess Diana, and Paris Hilton are among the large cast of familiar characters Gundle employs in his book—the underlying constant is that “[g]lamour is excessive and abundant and it strikes the imagination by bypassing the commonly accepted bourgeois sense of moderation and measure” (p. 11). After this account’s historic romp through eras of glitterati, glamour remains that which makes us want bigger, brighter versions of what we never knew we did not have.

Glamour provides a concrete framework for discussing a nebulous subject and is a useful starting point for those interested in examining the political, economic, and historical roles the concept of glamour has played in mediating the culture of the post-Enlightenment West.


The use of standardized testing systems in the United States during the last two decades as mechanisms to enhance accountability and improve the quality of education has opened an intense debate among social scientists. Objectifying Measures adds a new chapter to this discussion by analyzing the implementation and effects of high-stakes testing in Texas, a sort of national laboratory for testing policies in the United States. Since 1984, Texas has been constructing an accountability system that in its present form mandates high-stakes examinations that determine high school graduation and grade promotion at the fourth, sixth, and ninth grades. As a critical response to this process, Amanda Johnson participated actively in the support of a bill introduced by a state legislator to establish a multiple-criteria system that would diversify the measures of performance beyond testing by including teacher recommendations, portfolios of student work, grades and also parents’ opinion. Taking that experience as an ethnographic starting point, Johnson develops an historical and conceptual analysis of the mechanisms through which the high-stakes testing system and the statistical knowledge it produces reinforce unequal educational outcomes such as segregation, retention and tracking of racial minorities. Statistics, she argues, are used to support a system of authoritative knowledge that objectifies educational reality and student’s experience, creating the notion that underperformance by racial minorities is natural and inevitable. The policy is described as the result of the political confluence of different groups from the political right fostering privatization and increasing corporate intervention in public education. This way, “the hegemony of testing as part of the marketization of education is maintained through statistical discourse” (p. 7). Overall, the book is an interesting critical approach to the politics of American education that consciously
takes the risky choice of using social science as a tool for political activism.


Author of Why People Die by Suicide, psychologist Thomas Joiner tackles the prevailing misconceptions surrounding suicide in Myths about Suicide. He maintains that suicide is a result of feeling burdensome and alienated from others, and one by one, he debunks the myths that neglect to see it from this perspective. Recalling his father’s suicide, he uses his experience to illustrate the ambiguity suicidal individuals feel in regard to life and death. Suicide is stigmatized in contemporary society, but the mental illnesses that spawn such an act should not be, according to Joiner.

In Section One, “The Suicidal Mind,” Joiner discusses the way in which suicidal individuals think. He asserts, among others, that suicide is not a cowardly, selfish, or revengeful act. Section Two, “Suicidal Behavior,” addresses the common myths about the way in which suicide occurs. Suicides are not always accompanied by a note, suicide is not contagious and not an attention-seeking act. Most importantly, in this section, Joiner insists that suicide is treatable and preventable. Continuously referencing the suicides (both fatal and non-fatal) at the Golden Gate Bridge, he cites Richard Seiden’s seminal 1978 study, which found the vast majority of Golden Gate Bridge jumpers who were restrained proceeded to lead productive lives. Therefore, the notion that suicide attempters, prevented from jumping in this case, go on to use another method for suicide is false, and preventive measures, such as bridge barriers, can make a difference. In Section Three, “Causes, Consequences, and Subpopulations,” Joiner invalidates the statements of the media and renowned psychologists alike who believe, for example, that suicide is caused by medication, is not genetic, and is not committed by young children.

The conversational tone of this book, as well as the real-world examples, renders it accessible to people in all walks of life. Joiner feels passionately that scholars and non-scholars must come to understand, and thus not condemn, the mental illnesses that plague many of the world’s people. It is an emotionally charged topic approached in a straightforward, but not morbid, light.


This book is one in a series edited by Bernard Phillips and J. David Knottnerus. The series is inspired by C.Wright Mills and aims to advance the concept of Mills’ famously coined slogan sociological imagination. In Part I, the editors emphasize the salience of using scientific methods to expand our understanding of social problems and to supplement those scientific methods with “the Web and Part/Whole Approach.” The book criticizes the increasing specialization of sociology, how the discipline has neglected linking social problems to global phenomena, and how understanding these links could facilitate solving social problems.

Part II includes ten short essays written by professional sociologists; the essays range from the professionalization of sociology to the physical neglect of elderly patients in nursing homes. The authors of each essay attempt to remain genuine to the spirit of Mills, while simultaneously complementing their analysis with the Web and Part/Whole Approach.

Part III consists of two chapters. The editors give examples that encourage social scientists “to use the scientific method in everyday life.” This book is recommended to nascent graduate students of sociology, professional social scientists who are seeking a new approach to understanding social problems, and those who admire the work of C. Wright Mills.
This book looks at humor and laughter from a biological and cultural viewpoint. Alexander Kozintsev begins with philosophical, psychological, and linguistic theories of the meaning of humor and laughter: from the philosophical theories of Aristotle, to Kant and contemporary linguistic theories. There is an in-depth look at the dichotomy of humor as serious versus non-serious. Moving on to the biological aspects of laughter the book draws and past and current neuro-physiological studies as well as evolutionary origins of humor and laughter. It gets into the mechanics of laughter and its origins and uses for Homo sapiens as opposed to primates. He also emphasizes that laughter is not just a physiological reaction.

The next section looks at linguistic theories of play as related to humor and laughter, distinguishing between orderly play and disorderly play. According to Kozintsev orderly play or serious play is a reflection of culture and has no biological roots, whereas disorderly play or non-serious play have roots in the social play of primates. He goes on to define laughter as having an anti-symbolic meaning since the act of laughing prevents any symbolic communication. He also outlines why humor and irony should not be categorized together. In his fourth and final section Kozintsev discusses the semantics of laughter in culture against the natural semantics of laughter. He shows that attempts to change laughter into signs have failed because laughter is involuntary and a deeply unconscious act. He also challenges many popular theories of humor, from theories of humor as ritualistic and divine to theories of laughter as related to evil, while building his case starting with the many reflexive aspects of humor: that laughter is simply a mirror for Homo sapiens. This book may be helpful for anyone interested in laughter from a philosophical or a psychological perspective.


As global society becomes increasingly integrated, the problem of addressing the effects of disastrous events (caused by humans and nature) no longer appears to fall within neat national boundaries. As we have seen over the past few years, disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, the BP oil spill, and the earthquakes in Haiti have all been addressed by an amalgamation of state-response apparatuses, non-governmental organizations, non-profits, and private corporations. Disaster and the Politics of Intervention, a collection of essays edited by Andrew Lakoff, provides a look into these intersections between public and private interests, their response to disasters, as well their role in the mitigation of catastrophic risk. As this book is part of the Columbia/SSRC Privatization of Risk Series, the primary focus of this text is on the changing nature of the state mechanisms used to address disasters, such as disaster relief, infrastructure development, and environmental regulation.

While the topic of the book is broad, this small volume looks at specific contexts in which the theme of privatization in disaster response and mitigation arise. The essays in this book cover a range of issues, such as the limitations of risk calculation, or the interactions between private military contractors and humanitarians. This small number of examples, however, still provides an adequate framework for readers to begin to understand the effects of privatization in risk and disaster management. This book is suitable for anyone interested in the changing roles of the state and private interests in global society, as well as anyone interested in the development of social policy. Readers with little background in this topic will benefit most, as the essays are easily understood, and provide an excellent introduction to this ever-expanding field of research.

This book revolves around a street in the South Bronx, examining the differences in life opportunities available on the same street for author, Arthur Levine, and forty years later, for three adolescents, Leo, Carlos, and Juan Carlos. The book exposes the loss of opportunity and the death of the American Dream in urban areas across the United States.

The book is told in four parts. The first two sections provide snapshots of the important people and institutions in Arthur’s and Leo’s lives respectively, focusing on the boys’ neighborhoods, educations, families, and friends. The third section underscores the differences in the boys’ experiences and the amazing loss of opportunity that occurred on that same street over the course of four decades. The final section examines the lives of two anomalies, Carlos and Juan Carlos, who grew up with Leo yet made it to college. The authors analyze the educational success of Carlos and Juan Carlos to identify lessons that can be applied to enable more low-income children to attend college. In particular, they emphasize the importance of having a mentor, having contact with the world outside the neighborhood, being acquainted with higher education, and finding the right college. The book concludes with a description of three organizations, I Have a Dream, The Harlem Children’s Zone, and Say Yes to Education, which are working today to apply the above lessons in schools and communities. The book is an enjoyable read that skillfully illustrates the dramatic lack of opportunity for children in poor urban neighborhoods and posits insightful suggestions for ways to restore the American Dream for all children across the country.


A refreshingly candid and insightful stance on the perpetuation of the discrimination against homosexual men and women in the United States, From Disgust to Humanity makes a convincing case for the role of disgust in the formulation of both public opinion and law. In it, Martha Nussbaum argues adroitly for equal rights from a legal standpoint, but even more importantly highlights the significance of sympathy, respect, and imagination to the struggle to end disgust-informed politics.

Divided into six chapters (plus a preface and conclusion), this work does a thorough job of addressing not only the expected topics—gay marriage, the prevalence of risk behaviors in the homosexual community—but also takes time to examine the nature of disgust, its role as a social force, and the origins of the larger social problem of discrimination.

In Chapter One, Nussbaum introduces the reader to three prominent defenders of disgust, and examines and refutes their arguments in some depth. The book’s second chapter treats a broader topic: the politics of sexual orientation with respect to religion, gender, race, and disability, which necessarily addresses the subject of equal rights and the extent to which current laws violate the spirit and/or letter of the Constitution. Chapter Three is a disquisition on sodomy laws and related legislation, while in Chapter Four Nussbaum takes an analytical look at discrimination legislation, using seminal court cases to illustrate the ins and outs of the legislative processes surrounding the issue in question. Chapter Five discusses the case for gay marriage and obstacles to its universal institution, and the final chapter studies public sex businesses and their place in the current debate.

While From Disgust to Humanity would certainly prove a valuable read to students of constitutional law, this reviewer recommends it also to anyone who has observed with interest and would like to
better understand the ebb and flow of progress apropos recent sexual orientation legislation in the United States.


In a brisk and highly accessible style, the authors of Class War? use data from both their own national survey and previous surveys to examine Americans’ views of economic inequality and their support for government intervention to reduce it. Benjamin Page and Lawrence Jacobs argue that most Americans are philosophically conservative; that is, they are skeptical of government efficiency and believe in individual responsibility and free enterprise. However, they combine their conservatism with a pragmatic approach to the role that government can play in addressing barriers to pursuing opportunity. Drawing on survey data, the authors report that, across political and class lines, a majority of Americans express concerns about economic inequality in the United States. Furthermore, there is broad support for government efforts to expand opportunity by increasing funding for education, providing more jobs, and ensuring access to health care. Importantly, Page and Jacobs find that Americans are pragmatic in their approach to taxation in order to pay for these government interventions. The final chapter laments the gap between public opinion and Washington politics on the issue of economic inequality. The chapter ends with a forceful call for ordinary Americans to get more politically engaged and put more pressure on politicians. Though the style of the book is meant to appeal to a non-academic audience, scholars and instructors may nonetheless find this book to be an approachable and useful examination of how Americans view economic inequality.


Understanding the intersection between sex, gender, society and technology is more complicated today than in the past. Information technologies and biomedical advances have blurred traditional notions of bodies and identities; no longer is sex or gender a binary proposition easy distilled to male/female. In Gender Circuits, Eve Shapiro deftly navigates the sociological complexities of gender in a rigorous, yet accessible, analysis of the effects of the technological age on the way we view ourselves and each other. Shapiro begins the work by considering how our identity is shaped by, and shapes, our environment. From social scripts surrounding gender to virtual worlds like that of Second Life, the interaction between self and environment is mutually constitutive. The avatar one creates in Second Life, for example, both reflects and creates social norms and values. Moving beyond information technology, biomedical and body modification advancements have further confused traditional notions of gender and identity. Shapiro examines tattoos to sexual reassignment surgery to consider the complex ways one must navigate social identities. Even pronouns such as “he” and “her” create clearly delineated gender assignments—a situation Shapiro defines by using Ze (she/he) and hir (his/her) during select sections of Gender Circuits. Such details may seem trivial, but they speak to the myriad ways in which traditional notions of gender permeate contemporary culture. They have become part of the hegemonic discourse of sex—a discourse that Shapiro sets out to challenge. This challenge, and an important aspect of this work, is to expand the conversation beyond the confines of academia. Within the more academic sections of Gender Circuits are personal stories, case studies, and anecdotes that add a layer of personality and accessibility. The first case study, for example, focuses on tattooing and notions of masculinity. Whereas a casual reader may not grasp the performative aspects of gender,
framing them in terms of tattooing and cultural norms helps to ground the research in the lived experience of the reader.

*Gender Circuits* is a thoughtful and accessible work that helps shed light on many of the issues surrounding gender and identity in a technological age. It will answer questions surrounding gender and technology, and should go some way in opening up a dialogue.

List of Contributors:
Lisa Boyd
Nyesha Black
Erica Dollhopf
Jon Gobeil
Aaron Heresco
Stephanie Howe
Lauren Ann Huges
Breandan Jennings
Ezekiel Kimball
Sarah Koon-Magnin
Khai Le
Michael Light
Jennifer McClure
Steve Merino
Patrick Rafail
Adriana Reyes
Daniel Salinas
Richard Simon
James E. Thatcher
Lacey Wallace