

## **Social Psychology Panel**

Sharon Preves

First I would like to thank Ron Anderson and Ron Aminzade for inviting me to be a part of this dynamic one hundred-year celebration of sociology at the University of Minnesota. I am honored to be a graduate of this department and humbled to be among so many accomplished teachers and scholars today.

I want to take this time to reflect on my recent graduate career at the University of Minnesota as well as my recent transition into academe since graduation.

I am a very recent graduate of the University, having just completed my Ph.D. in sociology and feminist studies in August of 1999. I defended my dissertation on a Monday, and moved Thursday of the same week to Grand Rapids, Michigan where I took a tenure-track position in sociology at Grand Valley State University. I worked at Grand Valley for two years and took a leave of absence this past year for a one-year visiting position in sociology at Hamline University, my alma mater, for the 2001-2002 academic year. Just two weeks ago, Hamline offered me, and I joyously accepted, a tenure-track position in sociology.

I entered the University of Minnesota's Department of Sociology in the fall of 1993 after completing one year of Ph.D. coursework in medical sociology at the University of California San Francisco. I came to Minnesota with plans for a career in teaching sociology, a mission to which I am still very dedicated. I had the great pleasure of working with fabulous teaching mentors during my T.A. apprenticeships. I learned so much working with the masters themselves: Jeylan Mortimer, Ira Reiss, Joel Nelson, Steve Spitzer, Barbara Laslett, Don McTavish, Ron Anderson, Peggy Marini, Vicky Brockman, Dan Martin, Sue Fournier, Peter Hennen, Amy Miller, and Corwin Kruse.

I also had the opportunity to learn how much I love research and writing by working on two Life Course Center funded projects: first with Ira Reiss, where I learned the art of Guttman

scaling working with sexual attitude survey data; and more recently with Liz Boyle on her historical comparative legal research on international legislation regarding female genital cutting.

I was fortunate to work on early versions of my dissertation research with several faculty who are no longer members of the department, including Ira Reiss, Jennifer Pierce, and Jane McCleod.

Although I was a sociology and psychology double major as an undergraduate at Hamline, I have never taken a social psychology class. Still, I consider myself a social psychologist and have taught social psychology at the undergraduate level for several years – first at the University of Minnesota, and now at Hamline University.

I had a personal introduction to social psychology from the renowned Jeylan Mortimer, working with her initially as a teaching assistant for an undergraduate social psychology course and then later when she became my advisor, mentor, colleague and dear friend. I have benefited profoundly from Jeylan's direction. Her commitment to me and to my research has been unwavering. The timeliness and thoroughness of her feedback is second to none and she has gone to exceptional lengths to mentor and network me in the field of social psychology.

I also had the great fortune of working with Liz Boyle. Liz provided me with numerous opportunities for academic collaboration, including a project when I worked with her as her R.A. on research regarding international legislation against female genital cutting. I learned the details of scholarship from Liz, working by her side as an apprentice, and recently shared the honor of co-authoring an article with her in *Law & Society Review*. She has invested an exceptional amount of her time and energy in my professional development.

Doug Hartmann became involved with my dissertation research just as I was finishing data collection. Despite its brevity, his presence on my dissertation committee was vital. Doug's theoretical insights, especially in the area of social movements, challenged me to broaden my scope while writing my dissertation, and more recently in revising my dissertation for publication in book form with Rutgers University Press.

Since my time as a graduate student at Minnesota, I have continued to develop my research on identity, gender, sexuality, and medicine. One stage of this work will culminate in the publication of my forthcoming book, *Intersex: Stories of Negotiating the Contested Self* (Spring/Summer 2003). I have also published articles on this research in *The Journal of Clinical Ethics*, *Intersex in the Age of Ethics*, *Current Sociology*, and *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*.

My book is based on life history interviews with thirty-seven North American adults born intersexed, or physiologically sexually ambiguous (hermaphroditic). I explore how intersexuals experience and cope with being labeled sexually ambiguous in a culture that demands sexual conformity. I frame their stories with a sociological discussion of gender, the history of intersex medicalization, recent mobilization of intersexed adults, and the implications of their activism on identity negotiation, medical practice, academe, and cultural norms.

As a follow up to this life history research, I am beginning to explore physicians' processes of diagnosis and sex assignment, parent consultation, and response to recent critiques of surgical sex assignment for sexually ambiguous children. In future research, I plan to develop my growing interest in social psychological issues associated with organ transplantation, looking specifically at the impact of the rapidly expanding living organ donor programs in the United States.

On a final note, this July, Sylvia Tamale of Makerere University (U of MN Sociology Ph.D. 1997) Amy Kaler of the University of Alberta (U of MN Sociology Ph.D. 1998) and I will be presenting papers on a panel together in Kampala, Uganda at the Eighth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women. If I hadn't transferred to the University of Minnesota in 1993, I may never have met these outstanding women, nor have had the opportunity to work with the exceptional faculty, staff, and students associated with this department. I am very proud to have a Minnesota Ph.D. and am so glad to be back home!

## References

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Preves, Sharon E. 2002. Presenter, organizer, and chair, "Embodied Gender." *Eighth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women*. July 21-26; Kampala, Uganda.

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