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Postmodernism & Social Inquiry

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Many of the cases cited involved psychiatrists. Medicine has more often been the recipient of lawsuits than other helping professions; but as the author points out, "90 percent of all malpractice suits ever filed in the United States have been filed in the last twenty to twenty-five years" (p. 4). Other professions outside of medicine are only now beginning to catch up. Along with the new opportunities afforded to practice sociology is a climate which is more adversarial in nature than at any previous time.

Reamer covers the work of the private practitioner, the supervisor, and consultation. He devotes a chapter to improper treatment and impaired practitioners. As he is writing primarily to a social work audience, he castigates that field for its lack of research into impaired social workers. His standard of comparison is psychology. For the sociological practitioner, this should be a wake up call to police ourselves before the courts do it for us.

Other items covered include referral, record keeping, deception and fraud, termination of services, and concluding observations on the social worker as a defendant. The Sociological Practice Association *Ethical Standards*, modeled after the standards for psychologists, documents seven primary principles: 1) responsibility, 2) competence, 3) moral and legal standards, 4) public statements, 5) confidentiality, 6) welfare of the student, client and research subject, and 7) regard for professionals and institutions. Although this book does not cover all of these areas, it presents so much material so well, that it is a must at this time of great social upheaval.

Postmodernism & Social Inquiry, edited by David R. Dickens and Andrea Fontana. New York: The Guilford Press. 1994. 259 pp. \$40.00 cloth. ISBN 0-89862-415-0. \$18.95 paper. ISBN 0-89862-422-3.

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Postmodernism & Social Inquiry is a constructive attempt to bridge the often wide divide between ever multiplying postmodern frameworks and sociological theory and methods. Sociologists should welcome this book. The authors have succeeded in demonstrating both the value and limits of various postmodern theories for sociological inquiry.

Despite its ambitious agenda, the book is relatively short. Consequently, numerous theorists, approaches and debates are missing. As a reader with particular interests in the postcolonial theory of Gayatri

Spivak, queer theory [see "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities" *differences* 3(2):1991], and the lively feminist/postmodernist debates, I was disappointed that neither of the representative feminist chapters by Sondra Farganis and Andrea Fontana addressed these theorists or debates (nor did any of the other chapters, for that matter). Inattention to significant postcolonial, feminist, and queer theorists is particularly salient given the very focused attention allocated to other approaches. Whole chapters are devoted to one or two figures. David Ashley discusses Jean Baudrillard and Jean-Francois Lyotard. David R. Dickens describes the work of Daniel Bell and Fredric Jameson. Steven Best provides a very useful historical and analytical introduction to Michel Foucault who, I would argue as Best does, clearly has much to offer sociological inquiry. Here again I would have appreciated some attention to the extensive critique of Foucault's work by feminist theorists [see *Feminism and Foucault: Reflects on Resistance* edited by Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988)]. Readers with different interests may find other perspectives lacking. What may be called for is a subsequent volume that will include contemporary critiques of the postmodern frames addressed by *Postmodernism & Social Inquiry*.

Each author is faced with the challenging task of teaching us about the relevant work of the theorists they discuss, demonstrating how their approaches could be drawn into the theory and practice of sociology as well as critically assessing their usefulness for social inquiry. I was impressed with the authors' clarity of presentation as well as the critical stance they took with regard to assessing the value of each postmodern approach for sociology. The less satisfying chapters were the ones that created broad categories within a specific frame rather than address the work of particular theorists. For example, Farganis glosses over the contested terrain of feminist theories in a three stage periodization beginning with a "stage one" of liberal feminism. The challenges posed to liberal feminism by socialist feminism, third world and black feminisms, lesbian feminism and radical feminism are missing in this staged presentation. Her second stage conflates so-called "cultural feminism" and feminist standpoint epistemologies. When she moves to discuss what she calls "the third phase" of feminist theory, the joining of feminist theory with postmodernism, she mistakenly cites as an illustration Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna's discussion of gender "as a continuum, not a dichotomy" (p. 107). Depiction of gender "as a continuum," I would argue, is not necessarily a postmodern move. Here

was a logical place to introduce the reader to Judith Butler's analysis [see, for example, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990)].

The second half of the book addresses "postmodern research methods" and differs from the first half in detailing particular applications of postmodern theories. M. Gottdiener's chapter on semiotics provides a schema that contrasts sociosemiotics "with the received orthodoxy of the French postmodern school and especially with its reduction of cultural analysis to textual analysis alone" (p.177) that should appeal to those eager for some clear guidelines. Norman Denzin draws upon his research on the film *The Morning After* to illustrate how he incorporates "deconstructionism within the interpretive tradition" (p. 182). As an ethnographer, I especially appreciated Fontana's chapter on "Ethnographic Trends in the Postmodern Era" where he effectively blends together key anthropological and sociological accounts as well as some useful illustrations of the dilemmas posed by postmodern critiques of field-work methods. Robert Goldman and Steven Papson advance a fascinating analysis of the short-lived "Reebok Lets UBU" ad campaign. It is of special interest that the editors choose to end their collection with this chapter which argues against a postmodernism that "glosses over the relations of capitalist production" (p. 247). They explain:

Reebok continues to seek cheaper, more docile, labor in Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, postmodern analysts show no more interest in discussing this side of commodity production than does Reebok. (p. 249).

This book is a worthwhile resource for sociologists interested in gaining familiarity with the multiple faces of postmodern theories. The editors are wise to provide some guideposts for "a sociology of postmodernism" as well as "a postmodern sociology" (p. 19). This short volume will do more than simply inform. It should prompt the reader to take postmodern critiques seriously as challenges to the thinking and doing of sociology as well as a new focus of study. This book could also serve as a very accessible text for upper division undergraduates and graduate students alike. I highly recommend it.