

Judith Stacey, *Brave New Families*. New York: Basic Books, 1990. 328 pp.

In *Brave New Families*, Judith Stacey presents a story of changing family patterns in the postindustrial age. Through her portrayals of two families, she attempts to explode the 'myth' of the modern family. This myth, she believes, is contained in the ideology of the working class family as the last bastion of the traditional modern family. She contends that in the aftermath of Reagan's political and family policies (or lack thereof), it has been the working class woman who has pioneered new gender strategies for coping with these structural changes and have created a model for middle class families to emulate.

Stacey uses an ethnomethodological approach, concentrating on two families in the Silicon Valley, a community which she considers the post-industrial "ideal." Her interviews extend far beyond those of the two women who head these families to include sons and daughters, friends and co-workers, and even the founder of the fundamentalist church which Pam eventually joins. Although Stacey realizes the methodological dilemma in using such a small sample, she contends that the focus should be on the quality of the sample rather than the quantity. She is quite candid about the methodological problems inherent in this type of study, as well as her own problems in interpreting the lives of these families.

Stacey focuses on the families of Pamela Gama and Dotty Lewison. Pam, a former middle class housewife, found her life transformed by a women's re-entry program at the local community college, divorced her husband and suddenly became a single mother with three children. In order to cope with single parenthood and a series of layoffs, she turned to her related and fictive kin network which include friends, like Lorraine who at one point shared her household, co-workers like Jan, and even her ex-husband and his live-in lover Shirley. She later discovered something missing in her life and decided to marry her live-in lover, Al. The marriage was rocky; when Al has a life-altering spiritual conversion, Pam decided to follow him in joining the evangelical Global Ministries in order to save her marriage.

Dotty Lewison adopted other strategies in confronting her familial problems. An outgoing, energetic woman, Dotty's family story is riddled with spouse and child abuse, alcohol and drug problems, divorce and single parenthood. Her husband, Lou, the quintessential workaholic, had thrown himself into his job leaving Dotty time to become an active participant in community and feminist affairs. As a result of her newfound feminist ideals, Dotty had at one point left Lou and was seeing another man. But Lou's heart attack prompted her to go back to him, and since that time she and Lou have been struggling to establish equity in their home.

Pam and Dotty were both once actively involved in community and feminist issues; they both drew enough strength from their newfound communities to extricate themselves from their 'traditional' families and creatively sought alternative forms of family life. Yet, Stacey contends that the "burden of

freedom...under far from benevolent social conditions" proved too great for these women (Stacey, p.259). They consequently sought stability in marriage and religion. At the same time, however, Stacey believes that they have incorporated feminist solutions, albeit unacknowledged, in developing their "postfeminist" gender strategies.

Although Stacey recognizes the fact that the families she selected were unusual, one still questions the representativeness of her findings. Although Silicon Valley had experienced the well-documented expansion and contraction of industry, one wonders to what extent this community and the families who reside in that area mirror the rest of society. Stacey's selection of the families is also questionable, for it seems as though she chose her subjects by some sort of personal affinity, as in Pam's case, or by the outward appearance of "normalcy" in regards to the Lewiston's. These issues as well as others bring to light the problems inherent in ethnomethodological approaches. Also, Stacey at times becomes so personally involved with her subjects that it appears she has problems in maintaining researcher's objectivity.

Stacey's interpretive perspective is heavily influenced by her middle class, academic feminist background. In certain aspects of her research, it seems as though she tries to force the experiences of these women through her own feminist perspective and assumes that had the conditions been right, these women would have wholeheartedly embraced feminism. For example, she assumes that "had feminism been as visible and vigorous in the early 1960's when Eleanor [the founder of Global Ministries] abandoned her marriage, she would now be organizing feminist rather than Christian shelters for battered women (Stacey, p.138)." She also shows her own bias toward these women; in the introduction, she states that during her research she was struggling with the demise of her "anti-modern" family. It is unclear what distinguishes her "anti-modern" family from those "postmodern" families that she studied. That is, does one have to be an avowed feminist to have an anti-modern family and what is the difference?

Although she states that these women have incorporated the gains of the feminist movement, she only partially addresses why these women turned to religion and marriage and disavowed feminism in the first place. This should cause feminists anxiety about the lack of appeal that feminism has for working class women and should alert them to the exclusiveness that characterizes the contemporary feminist movement.

Overall, *Brave New Families* is an interesting book to read and does present some serious problems in contemporary family life. It should prove to be a catalyst for further study about gender and class relations in forging new family structures. But as Stacey discovered, probing the intimate relations of these and other families can be problematic methodologically, personally and ethically.

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