

## Mirra Komarovsky, from page 1

the director of the women's studies department. She received the Emily Gregory Award for teaching excellence, the Barnard Distinguished Alumna Award, the Medal of Distinction. She really was a Barnard woman.

In books like *Blue-Collar Marriage*, *Dilemmas of Masculinity*, and *Women in College: Shaping New Feminine Identities*, Mirra explored the dynamics of family and gender. The outlines of her thinking are evident in her 1946 article in the *American Journal of Sociology*, "Cultural Contradictions and Sex Roles." She showed that women's ambivalence was a response to institutional contradictions that stifled women's sense of self; that progressive attitudes without institutional rearrangement would not guarantee sexual equality; that women's playing dumb was a way to cope with paradox—higher education compromised their success with male students; that functionalist accounts of family life missed the role of conflict between the sexes.

Writing in *Harpers* in the early 1950s, she decried the neo-anti-feminism of the times. The president of Mills college had suggested that "learning how to prepare Basque paella would be as fulfilling for women as a course in post-Kantian philosophy." Mirra fired back with *Women in the Modern World*, a polemical brief for sexual equality.

Eventually, Mirra would earn recognition in the sociology profession: presidencies of the American Sociological Association and the Eastern Sociological Society, the Distinguished Career Award of the ASA, the Common Wealth Award and much more would come her way.

A remarkable continuity, of interest and spirit, marked Mirra's life. In recent years, when you were allowed to visit—when she felt good enough and looked good enough to entertain—you would witness the same old-world grandness, the twinkling eyes, the precision of phrasing, her beauty, the gentle irony, and always, her virtually life-long immersion in the sociological enterprise.

In 1991, Mirra received poor evaluations for her gender class. She was 86 years old. She ticked off the criticisms: "Poorly organized, difficult to understand lectures, and the like. It was all the more disheartening because it came as a surprise." Typically, ever the good empiricist, she set about researching the cause; in 1992, she received the best evaluations in years. "I need to prove

the following calumny wrong," she declared: "A sociologist says things everyone knows in a language nobody understands."

Around the same time, Mirra was writing about new developments in gender theory; I think it was a piece for the *Annual Review of Sociology*. Trying to get the hang of all the fashionable work on "discourse" and gender, she asked me what I thought: I said that discourse sounded fancier than Mirra's preferred word—"role"—which sounded square, and a bit clunky, but was perfectly serviceable: it had the virtue of saying plainly what she meant so that everyone knew what she was saying. She just smiled since she knew all this.

Mirra's empiricism was not philosophically shallow; unflashy did not mean inelegant, and surely not unstylish. Her sociological work was based on the elegance of understatement, of clarity, of the rejection of narcissism: Her interest remained in the object of her curiosity.

It is no cliché to say that Mirra was ahead of her time; I close with a few selections from fifty years ago that evoke her spirit and her substance.

"If men believed for a moment that the rearing of children is as difficult and important as building bridges, they would demand more of a hand in it."

"I now state even more explicitly that equality for women in the public spheres will not be realized as long as we maintain traditional role segregation within the family, with no alternative options."

"*Women in the Modern World* did not re-ignite the women's movement the way, a decade later, Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* deservedly did. The time was not ripe but much more importantly, my book was written in tones of sweet reasonableness; it was friendly to men. It did not, as a revolutionary tract must, summon the reader's rage. In fact, its rueful satire of our society was so subtle, at least for Friedan, that she used a paragraph of mine as illustration of the prevailing counsel of adjustment to the status quo."

"I support the values of family, but not only in rhetoric and not for women only. We could not convince women that child-rearing was a most valued social task unless men believed it too; unless our whole society became oriented toward values that cherish strength and compassion, nurturance and creativity." □

Komarovsky was not given to self-promotion, which may help to explain why sometimes, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, she received less credit as a pioneer than she deserved. Today it is clear that her work yields an invaluable record of lives in particular places at particular times.

Joan Huber  
ASA President (1989)

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## Tribute, from page 4

about career and motherhood.

The second theme of Komarovsky's writing, blue-collar lives, appeared in two studies. In *The Unemployed Man and His Family* (1940) Komarovsky asked how a man's bread-winning ability affected his authority at home. In *Blue-Collar Marriage* (1962), probably her best-known book, women respondents explained in their own words what seemed awry in their lives. While she was sympathetic with husbands, she illuminated marital problems of blue-collar wives in a way that heralded the new women's movement later in the decade.

In all her work, her primary research tool was the case study. A limited number of interviews evoked an immediacy of experience and a sense of the complicated fullness of lives that cannot be attained in large sample surveys. At the same time, she never lost sight of the limits of case methods, taking great pains to ensure that her research described reality as accurately as possible.

## "It's in the ASR . . ."

### Collective Violence and Group Solidarity

by Susan G. Singley  
ASR Graduate Assistant

Sociological accounts of group conflict typically ignore, or treat as unproblematic, *intra*-group collective action problems facing groups in contention. Rather, the focus of such inquiries tends to be on the sources of inter-group tensions that can escalate to conflict and violence. Shared interest and action are taken as givens, and, indeed, are assumed to be strengthened or made more likely by external conflicts. In the June 1999 issue of *ASR*, Roger Gould challenges the standard assumptions of group conflict research, proposing that the tension between individual and collective interests *within* groups creates obstacles to group unity, and these obstacles in turn are central forces in the generation of group violence. He tests his thesis using nineteenth century court data on violent incidents in Corsica, a society with a strong tradition of family honor and prestige, and a collectivist social organization.

Gould argues that individual-level costs and benefits are central to understanding the process of group conflict: While individuals benefit from the protection offered by group membership they must also be willing to offer themselves—potentially their lives—as part of that protection. *Individuals* in dispute will summon their respective allies for support in order to demonstrate strength to their adversaries. The effectiveness of this demonstration, however, is only as strong as the perceived sincerity of the solidarity, and adversaries may refuse to back down in order to test this sincerity. Levels of sincerity on the part of disputants' kin, for example, are themselves driven by individual-level decisions about how high a price one is willing to pay to (potentially) reap future benefits of mutual aid and protection. "Expressions of group solidarity are therefore double-edged: They may succeed in forestalling escalation, but they intensify the violence that occurs if

they fail to do so" by involving two groups rather than two individuals, and raising the stakes for all involved.

The Corsican data provide support for the author's arguments about the "double-edged" nature of group solidarity. For example, Gould finds that, even in a society known for its feuding family groups, one-on-one violence was the norm: Individual violence did not lead automatically to group violence. In addition, evidence of group-level involvement was greater among those conflicts that did not lead to lethal violence than among those that did. Further, among those disputes that did lead to lethal violence, groups were much more likely to be involved if at least one of the groups had engaged in some form of dispute-related group action prior to the violence, suggesting that group solidarity had previously become a salient issue. Similarly, collective violence was more likely to occur in conflicts involving long-time adversaries, among whom reputations for group solidarity would be especially important.

Gould's thesis and results suggest that within-group dynamics involving the tension between individual and collective interests—expressed most clearly in the development and maintenance of "group solidarity"—are central to understanding group conflict. However, "[t]he principal insight in this account is that it is the fragility of group solidarity, not its strength, that leads to the intensification of conflict."

#### Also in the June ASR

In addition to the Gould article, the June 1999 issue of *ASR* contains an article on the principles of cohesion in cohabitation and marriage; a qualitative study of VE day commemoration in Germany; a sociophysiological study of the dynamics of social interaction; an article on the structuring of organizational populations; and two articles on immigrants, minorities, and residential segregation. □

## What's New in JHSB?

by John Mirowsky, Editor

The June issue of the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* presents innovative studies in biosociology, health policy and organizational change, and marriage and mental health, along with the memoirs of a founder of contemporary medical sociology.

Biosociology examines the biological consequences or causes of social relationships. Allen Fremont, of Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard's Fellowship Program in General Internal Medicine, and Chloe Bird, of Brown's Community Health and Sociology, summarize the development and goals of biosociology. Two research reports illustrate the contributions sociologists can make. Alan Booth, David Johnson, and Douglas Granger examine the association between men's depression levels and their testosterone levels. They argue that medical science considers low testosterone a problem, because it represents an organic dysfunction. Behavioral science considers high testosterone a problem, because of related aggressive or antisocial behavior. Booth, Johnson, and Granger exploit a military survey of veterans to test their hypothesis of a u-shaped relationship between depression and testosterone levels. They also test the hypothesis that social pathology accounts for elevated depression associated with above-average testosterone. Switching to biology as dependent variable, Mark Peyrot, James McMurry, and Davida Kruger test the effects of social stress on glycemic control in diabetics. They distinguish between direct effects and those mediated by adherence to medical regimen. They nicely describe the distinct pathologies of Types I and II diabetes as they relate to the hypothetical direct and indirect effects of social stress.

Two studies of policy and change analyze large-scale social adaptation. Steve Harkreader and Allen Imershein analyze the conditions needed for state action in Florida's health care market. They describe Florida's political climate during a critical period of restructuring in the medical industry. They summarize each relevant state bill of the period. Using Boolean algebra, they find the combination of conditions that characterize the bills resulting in state action. Thomas D'Aunno, Thomas Vaughn, and Peter McElroy examine another recent large-scale change. They analyze the response of drug treatment organizations to the AIDS epidemic. The organizations had to adopt public health goals and approaches that often conflicted with their traditional ones. The study analyzes the effects of organizational attributes and relationships on HIV prevention efforts.

On the personal level, Robin Simon and Kristen Marcussen examine the beliefs about marriage that enlarge or shrink the effects of a change in marital status on change in depression. Using the National Survey of Families and Households, they show that the strength of certain beliefs appears to enlarge the emotional benefits of getting married and the emotional costs of getting divorced. In the absence of the beliefs changes in marital status appear to have little or no association with depression.

The issue begins with a return to the roots of contemporary medical sociology. Robert Straus, winner of the 1998 Leo G. Reeder award, gives his personal perspective from fifty years of work in medical sociology. In a fitting beginning to the issue, he sketches the critical decades of sociology's integration into the clinical and basic medical sciences. □