

## **Abstracts from the Thirteenth Annual Conference on Ethnic and Minority Studies “Ethnic Identity: Aging, Mental Health, and Sexism”**

In an attempt to record a sense of the formal sessions at the 1985 Conference, the registration director asked Chairs to assemble abstracts and respondent comments from their sessions. Although the objective was full-coverage, it remains a goal for 1986.

### **SESSION I: Images in Literature**

Chair: Luis Pinto, Bronx College, CUNY

#### **Lee Hadley and Ann Irwin, Iowa State University. “Hidden Messages in Young Adult Literature: From Alpha to Omega”**

... pinpoints the subtle and not so subtle ways sexism, aging, and racism appear in novels teenagers are reading. Particular attention is given to the latest means of luring young readers: the teenage romance, patterned after the adult Harlequin novel, a trend that echoes the 50s with its emphasis on white, middle-class characters, the necessity of snaring a boy friend, the importance of being beautiful, and the stereotyping of minorities, women, and older characters. The paper includes specific examples of this stereotyping and suggests alternatives which both readers and writers may wish to examine.

#### **Walter Shear, Pittsburg State University. “Saroyan’s Study of Ethnicity”**

Of his many works dealing with the situation of the ethnic, Armenian American writer William Saroyan’s *My Name Is Aram* is the most systematic in its focus on the dual allegiance of the ethnic—to the values of an old order and to the creation of new possibilities. Using the boy Aram as his central figure, Saroyan dramatizes the pathos and the comedy of the ethnic predicament. In his analysis, characters are operating in two arenas, an official world of social roles and a personal world which can be characterized as a community of feelings. In most of the stories in this collection these two arenas are paralleled and given public enhancement by the social divisions between the American mainstream culture and the Armenian ethnic society.

#### **Barbara Hiura, University of California, Berkeley. “The Woman Warrior and Hunger of Memory: Two Different Voices of Ethnic Identity”**

Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory* are two autobiographical accounts which reflect two very different voices concerning their respective life experiences and their ethnic identities. The focus of this paper is on how Kingston and Rodriguez perceive their ethnic identity in light of

their own cultures and the white institutional and social environment. A discussion of Kingston and Rodriguez provides depth and sheds light on the impact literature has on the power of self definition in a white controlled/English dominant culture. Perceptions of ethnicity, sexism, racism, and cultural oppression are not new themes; however, in light of these two autobiographies, the external and internal forces that determine one's social, psychic and ego self provide insights into the colonized mind and the culturally liberated self.

**Respondent: Stewart Rodnon, Rider College.**

To synthesize the three papers in this section, the adage, "Follow the dollar," is an enticing possibility. This injunction is simply the common-sense answer to most of our ethnic problems in this capitalist, acquisitive society, a society which needs an exploitable laboring class. Historically this class was composed largely of slaves—first and briefly Native Americans and then for an extended period, Afroamericans; however, after a cruel and bloody civil war this emphasis shifted to "free" blacks, Southern and Eastern Europeans and Asian Americans, and still later to Hispanic Americans. Further, the society has traditionally exerted heavy pressure to Americanize, i.e., to perpetuate its own hegemony on these groups simply, if tacitly, in order to continue its economic dominance. This pattern leads to Barbara Hiura's brilliant analysis of how two ethnic writers—Maxine Hong Kingston and Richard Rodriguez—define themselves. By choosing three linked criteria—primary cultural retention, language retention, and control over the function of language—she demonstrates that Kingston acted courageously, even heroically, while Rodriguez basically sold out his Chicano heritage. The psychological insult which that process engenders is clearly seen in both writers.

Walter Shear's perceptive essay on Saroyan's study of ethnicity points out this distinction between the official world (the mainstream) and the ethnic community ("a free and innocently irresponsible activity of the human spirit") and the struggle—exactly Rodriguez's—of balancing these two opposing cultures. He discusses sensitively, too, Saroyan's depiction of the ethnic's "persistent concern for one another's personhood," the extended-family motif, the need for these strong emotional ties in an alien world, and, in addition, notes the denigration of the patriarch, frequently caused by his reduced status in a racist world. I would argue that these phenomena are rooted in the economic system, one that virtually assures, given our history, that racism will continue.

Lee Hadley and Ann Irwin's lively and clever presentation of the young-adult paperback book segment of the American publishing scene (a scene difficult to parody for it seems itself a parody) surely shows the "follow the dollar" adage, too. For if anywhere that the absolute dollar has corrupted absolutely, it is here. The silly pap of contemporary young-adult, mass-produced paperbacks with their shelf life of fifteen to twenty days at our friendly neighborhood supermarket is swallowed wholesale by their readers. This simply reinforces the idea that today's teens have obtained a near-monopoly on "non-think." I say "near-monopoly" because devotees of trivial pursuit games run a close second. Anyway, I loved the creativity, satire, and wit of the paper.

[Editor's Note: Hadley Irwin's paper will appear, without the antics of the authors, in the fall issue of the *Newsletter*.]

### **SESSION III: Ethnicity and Aging: A Minority Literary Perspective**

#### **Carol Hunter, University of Oklahoma. "Ethnicity and Tribal Elders in American Indian Literature"**

In Osage Indian customs the elderly maintained the tribe's mythology that supports the social structure. The grandfather motif symbolizes the tribes' relation to nature represented in the clan's naming ceremonies. In N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* the alienated protagonist's self respect is restored through his grandfather's Tewa cosmic view that reveals pueblo land ethics. James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* focuses on Blackfeet identity as it relates to "sense of place" as seen through the

grandparent's oral history. These novels and fiction by other American Indian writers reveal that the grandparent's role represents tribal ethnicity and symbolizes a voice for authors to address contemporary ecological issues.

**Alice A. Deck, University of Illinois-Urbana. "Depictions of the Elderly Black in American Literature"**

This paper discussed the various ways in which Afroamerican elderly are represented in American literature as falling into one of three categories. First, there are those works which present a near mythic, primordial character who symbolizes emotional stability, experiential wisdom, and a people's cultural heritage. Second, there are those works written in the vein of slice-of-life realism which dramatize the social and psychological conditions unique to the aged Afroamerican. Third, there are works which depict a confrontation between old and young; a confrontation intended as symbolic of the confrontation between old and new social standards.

**Marvin A. Lewis, University of Illinois-Urbana. "Ethnicity and Aging: A Dual Chicano Perspective"**

A generally held assumption is that Mexican American aged occupy a position of respect in the extended family structure. Social scientists have studied this group and have concluded that traditional values are very much intact but facing a tremendous amount of stress because of a shift from an agrarian to an urban society with the aged not exempt from generational shifts and changes. Creative writers, too, have been preoccupied with the position of the elderly in society. Figures such as the *jefita*, the *abuelita*, and the *curandera* are held in high esteem in popular culture. This study examines briefly the presentation of the aged in three novels and a book of poetry.

#### **SESSION IV: Community Services and the Elderly**

Chair: Proshanta K. Nandi, Sangamon State University

**Irene Hill, Iowa State University. "Elderly Russian Migrants in Adelaide, Australia"**

After W. W. II, the Australian government actively sought migrants and "displaced persons" as workers in factories, the mining and building industries, and to help in the development of the transport infrastructure. Many studies relating to health services, accommodation, and the effect on the elderly of changing family structures, have made reference to the particular situation in which elderly migrants in Australia have found themselves. This research, within a cultural geographical and sociological framework, aimed to establish the number of Russian migrants in Adelaide beyond the age of sixty, where and how they lived, and their migration routes into Australia. The study also aimed to establish their use and knowledge of community facilities, their relationship to the wider community, their involvement in activities within their own ethnic community, and any changing family patterns.

Respondent: Keith Parker, Mississippi State University.

Irene Hill's thought provoking discussion of "Elderly Russian Migrants in Adelaide, Australia," is a notable contribution to our understanding of the polymorphous and mutable nature of ethnicity and community studies. The author provides both laymen and scientists with an understanding of how the practical difficulties of accommodation and adjustment can arise when individuals from different backgrounds decide to construct a life in a foreign land. Moreover, the author provides us with the precise meaning of ethnic identity in contemporary Australia, and of the ways non-economic factors such as traditions and culture are of importance in maintaining "a quality of life" for Russian migrants over sixty years of age.

Hill weaves the feelings of personal satisfaction and welfare needs of the elderly Russian migrants into a heartwarming story of how ethnic identification emerges within the confines of shared territories. More important, the author recognizes the importance of background factors and the roles they play in the development and delivery of community services.

A description of the population of interest shows it to be diverse in terms of education, occupation, and previous experiences. In addition, she describes and

analyzes the "lack of usage" of community services available to Russian migrants of sixty years and above.

Hill notes two emerging social groups among community residents. One group, associated with the St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, is comprised of members of the community who originally came from both Europe and China. The second group, associated with the Pentecostal and Seven Day Adventist Faith, consists of members of the community who were later arrivals. As a speaker of the sampled group's language, the author had opportunities to communicate and observe the continuing needs of the community residents. She observed that few migrants took advantage of community services such as "Meals on Wheels" and "Domiciliary" or health care.

Although the author writes in an enthusiastic, flowing, and easy-to-read style, the major portions of the paper contain a "minimum" of methodology. Hill's writing skills are a credit to academia in that the paper can be enjoyed and used by both laymen and professionals.

Hill's presentation reflects a growing concern for community studies. It also raises questions. For example, what specific difficulties do migrants with severe health problems face as mobility decreases? Do factors such as education, occupation, and background experiences influence adjustment in later years? If so, how? What role(s) does/do community residents play in determining the types of service available to community residents?

## **SESSION V: Media**

### **Charles C. Irby, Iowa State University. "The Celluloid Black"**

... is a twelve-minute slide-tape program, the completed version of a presentation made at the Twelfth Annual Conference on Ethnic and Minority Studies. The program is an introduction to the early history of blacks in films in one sense and looks at roles and images used by black filmmakers to combat "Hollywood's" images. The Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame, Lincoln Motion Picture Company, Oscar Micheaux are highlighted. The program is intended for use with students from high school through college classes and for interested community groups—at all levels. Finally, the program is designed to be both educational and entertaining.

### **John L. Weinkein, Iowa State University. "Multiculturalism Integrated into an Art Education Curriculum."**

Ward Goodenough's conceptualization of "multiculturalism as the normal human experience" is the premise for the pre-service teaching program in art education at Iowa State University. The commitment is to integrate, at all stages of preparation for vertical continuity, multicultural and cross-cultural content.

The outcome has been the successful implementation of teaching strategies by student teachers in the field. Visual examples of these strategies are shared through a slide presentation. Examples cover a range of grade levels for individual and group production and types of strategies: motivational, in-process, art historical, and values-revealing in art, including areas of content, media, skills, and affective behavior.

### **Gina Webster, Cal Poly University, Pomona. "The Black Aged: A Diverse Population"**

... is a twelve-minute videotape of people who live beyond the margins of traditional sociological and media stereotypes of blacks as the perpetual underclass in U.S. society. A first production.

### **David M. Gradwohl and Nancy M. Osborn, Iowa State University. "Blacks and Whites in Buxton: A Site Explored, A Town Remembered."**

Early in this century more than 5,000 people, most of whom were black, lived in a company-owned, coal-mining town called Buxton, Iowa. Today, former residents remember the good life there. Excavations at the abandoned townsite reveal buried artifacts of the well-planned and relatively prosperous community.

Silvester J. Brito, University of Wyoming. **"Curanderos in South Texas."**

This presentation visually illustrates the socio-political role of curanderos in the Nino Fidencio cult. Not only does the curandero manipulate the behavior of followers at the local level but in so doing attempts to gain a greater following when operating within the socio-religious yearly retreat of curanderos at Espinazo, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. This form of latent competition between curanderos is the result of cult leaders seeking to achieve both political status and prestige within their local communities as well as acquiring personal wealth in the form of material culture.

## SESSION VI: Ideology and Self Esteem

Chair: Linda M. C. Abbott, Calif. School of Professional Psychology

David Castellanos, Northern Illinois University. **"Schooling and Mexican Americans: Power, Policy and Ideology in an Internal Colonial Context"**

In an internal colonial relationship, the economic exploitation of one group by another develops a unique power relationship—a third dimensional one. This relationship relies on both the oppressed and the oppressor accepting the same norms, values, ideals, symbols, rituals, institutions, and so forth, which developed to maintain, enhance, and perpetuate the existing power relationship.

This paper investigates how this unjust relationship was formed and how it is being perpetuated. It also examines the process which policy and ideology take in maintaining the relationship as well as the role played by educational institutions in maintaining the policy and perpetuating the ideology.

Delo E. Washington. **"Folk and Formal References to Self Esteem in Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*"**

Washington views Walker's subjective portrayal of a series of events in the lives of Georgian black family as a case study in developmental cycles within the context of folk culture. Using theoretical models drawn from Erickson and Sharpley, she discusses the factors impacting upon the development of self esteem in an oppressive context. Issues of integrity vs. despair, nature vs. nurture, and class vs. caste are illuminated by the author's special sensitivity to and use of a womanist perspective.

Elizabeth Branch. **"Private Black Colleges: Sleeping Giants for Black Americans"**

In this overview of the current position of black colleges, Branch addresses issues of origin, purpose, stability, and cultural context of these distinctive educational institutions. Founded to soothe white conscience, these colleges continue to play a remedial role, both in skill development and in enhancing self esteem through developing awareness of black cultural heritage. Branch argues persuasively for continued support of these institutions and for an expansion of their role, capitalizing upon their position of creative potential as private institutions responsive to a distinctive population.

Respondent: Alice A. Deck

Each of these papers can be linked by their overriding concern with self esteem, a basic concept in the literature on mental health. Fundamental to self esteem, particularly for minorities, are the availability of satisfactory physical and economic circumstances, and the continuing presence of others who provide positive feedback regarding one's worth.

Branch is supportive of America's private black colleges as an important means through which young blacks can build pride in their ethnic heritage while learning basic skills for responsible adult functioning. Given the threat posed to the future of these institutions by financial instability, Branch's plea that alumni take responsibility for regular support is understandable.

The Washington and Castellanos papers demonstrate that low self esteem among minorities results in part from myths of inferiority perpetuated by the dominant white middle class. Washington's discussion of Alice Walker's novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* finds the lack of integrity and stability of one family to result from a lengthy pattern of abuse, self hatred, mistrust, and shame. Grange Copeland's tragedy, from the slave ancestors to his murderous son Brownfield, reflects the family's absorption of white society's view of blacks as less than human. The novel, as a case study in low self esteem within one family unit, is a useful supplement to social and psychological work focusing on the topic.

Castellanos's point is to identify the role of the American educational system in perpetuating low self esteem among Mexican Americans. This internal colonial relationship forces those subjugated to accept the ideals, values, rituals, and institutions which perpetuate existing power relationships. This perpetuation frequently takes the form of restricting Mexican American youth from college entrance tracks in school. While Branch argues that private and public black colleges have addressed this issue for blacks, Castellanos finds slight prospect for occupational enhancement in community based education for Mexican Americans. Frustration in educational aspiration, repeated generation after generation, serves to perpetuate myths about ethnic heritage and to maintain low self esteem for this group much in the manner outlined from the fictional character, George Copeland.

The papers allude to the range of self esteem levels within ethnic groups, but focus on the limiting influence of other peoples' opinions, as well as of economic and physical condition. Ethnic heritage can be a source of shame or of pride, depending on individual experiences and perspectives developed within these contexts.

## **SESSION VIII: Conflicting Views**

Chair: Lynn E. Buquo, University of Cincinnati

Foster Brown, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. **"Invisible Ethnicity"**

The majority of human service workers in southern Illinois are white as are the majority of their clientele. It is this whiteness which leads them to see a commonality with their clients yet blinds them to the ethnic factors involved. This perception can lead to false interpretations of data and inappropriate strategies of intervention.

In order to be more effective service providers, workers must understand the ethnic factors. Toward this end the paper briefly explores the history of southern Illinois over the last eighty years in an attempt to determine significant events that have socialized the residents into a "southern Illinois" perspective and affected services and the delivery of services.

D. John Lee, Tabor College. **"Strategies of Identity"**

This paper reviews the search for identity in a modern pluralistic culture. Identity is defined as one's sense of worth and belonging which provides meaning and direction to life; it is how one defines oneself in order to know how to act and what to value. Strategies of identity in modern society can be summarized into five categories: (1) identity through profession, (2) identity through ethnicity or gender, (3) identity through reason and beliefs, (4) identity through free will or choice, and (5) identity through transcendence. These five strategies are reviewed and the concept of identity is criticized.

Bruce Perry, Philadelphia. **"The Quest for 'Identity': Health or Sickness?"**

The quest for "identity" has traditionally been assumed to be a healthy one. The following article, which questions that assumption, stresses the terrible price the human race continues to pay for each ethnic, racial, religious, and political group's insistence on its own separate, artificial identity.

**Robert Warshawsky, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. "Hermeneutics and Identity: Methodology for Ethnic-Sensitive Practice"**

A hermeneutically informed practice is suggested that would further sensitize practitioners to the unique meanings of their client's ethnic experience. Hermeneutical rules of interpretation are given that would guide practice. Clients' past history and present social circumstances are interpreted in light of their total experience giving substance to their unique identity formation. The practitioner's own prejudice is examined within the client/worker relationship. The practitioner is required to suspend initial judgment toward the client in order to free-up his/her feeling, attitudes, and behavior. Using this perspective, a "fusion" of experience between practitioner and client is sought whereby mutual understanding may be enhanced.

**SESSION IX: Education**

Chair: Meredith Reinhart, California State University, Sacramento.

**Jacqueline Ulmen Zbaracki, Des Moines Area College. "Behavioral or Developmental: Psychosocial Development of Southeast Asian Preschool Children"**

Most Child Development research is based on middle class American children. Association with Southeast Asian parents and children suggests rethinking and adjustment of some commonly held developmental phenomena in psychosocial development is in order. The paper considers aspects of Erik Erickson's theory of Child Development, the American assumptions operating with each, and observed Southeast Asian phenomena. While growth and development are common to all children, behavioral differences need to be examined in light of society and maturation. This paper is not intended to provide answers but rather to raise questions suggested by close observation of Southeast Asian families with preschool children.

**Norman L. Friedman, California State University, Los Angeles. "Teaching about the Holocaust in the Racial and Ethnic Relations Course"**

Some consideration of the Holocaust can provide valuable historical and comparative perspectives for the largely American society-oriented course in the sociology of racial and ethnic relations. Teaching about the Holocaust can help to illustrate and further analyze the topics of (1) the patterns and causes of discrimination and prejudice, especially a "political/bureaucratic" explanation, and (2) minority reactions to prejudice and discrimination, especially through the response of "spiritual resistance."

**Dorena M. Lee, San Francisco. "Implementing Bilingual Instruction in a Chinamerican Preschool"**

This presentation looks at cultural sensitivity in the materials presented to Amerasian children in San Francisco. An important aspect of the project focuses on parental involvement—coming into the classroom, bringing materials from the home, working with the children at home, and general parental participation in educating their children. An example of teacher and parent involvement includes activities such as making "rock soup" to demonstrate sharing, nutrition, and socialization. A bilingual parent handbook encourages and maintains communication between the home and school.

## **SESSION XI: Indochinese Americans: Gender and Community**

Chair: Gretchen M. Bataille, Iowa State University

### **Foster Brown, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. "Self-Identity of a Vietnamese Refugee"**

This paper analyzes the adaptation of Southeast Asian women refugees in the United States through the experiences of a Vietnamese woman and her family. Viewed from a social system's perspective, the experiences serve to illustrate the stages through which most people pass when they move from one culture to another as well as the effects this has on self-identity and puts them in human terms and perspective. Thus, it is a case study that integrates social science theory and social work practice which can be utilized by agencies and practitioners to assist other Asian women who are going through similar experiences.

### **Charles C. Irby, Iowa State University, and Ernest Pon, Sacramento City Unified School District. "Mental Health Considerations of Male Hmong and Mien in the United States"**

Male Hmong and Mien in the United States suffer severely as displaced persons. They are not only physically separated from their homeland but also suffer psychological trauma resulting from that displacement. This paper investigates: (1) life in America for male Hmong and Mien, (2) the role of Hmong and Mien women in the U.S. economy in lessening the male's traditional role in the clan, (3) the impact of youth in creating trauma for male elders, (4) how "idle time" (no job) functions to diminish self-esteem, and (5) what methods can be used to re-orient those who have lost their traditional role within the clan.

### **Joan Randall and Clair Christensen, University of California, Davis. "Old Information in a New Setting: A Case for the Establishment of Settlement Houses in the Hmong Community"**

This paper is a description of aspects of the Hmong (Highland Lao) community in Fresno and Merced Counties in California. It draws on the experiences gained through an Office of Refugee Resettlement grant to University of California Cooperative Extension. The Hmong are a tribal mountain people, preliterate and, in general, believers in animism. The normative immigrant/refugee system in the United States was ill-equipped to respond to their acculturation needs; therefore, numerous communities are faced with citizens who know little of the basic knowledge we use in modern American life. For well over the majority of these tribal refugees in the Central Valley, alienation and subsequent isolation are their realities. Building upon their special strengths and the uniqueness of their problems, a specific strategy is described and suggested. The focus and main purpose of the discussion is addressing the need to increase shared interactions among the refugees as well as with the dominant society. This is a community developer's view of this new Asian imprint on California and the U.S.

### **Respondent: Peter Kranz, Lock Haven State University**

As the respondent for this session, I was moved by the presenters' sensitivity and commitment to their subject. The papers themselves were extremely informational, well written, and documented. However, when presented, these papers breathed an excitement of real involvement with crucial human issues rather than mere vocalizations of statistics and rhetoric. This energy given off by the participants in the form of understanding and caring moved the audience to become as deeply involved as the presenters with the subject.

Randall's and Christensen's paper was a moving experience of how two educators in extension education created an ingenious neighborhood activity center to provide a bridge between the dominant culture and the Hmong refugees. The authors' compassion for the struggles of the Hmong was compelling particularly when viewing the human dilemma faced between their own identity and culture and acculturation within the majority culture. The problems of maintaining this delicate balance were clearly stated along with possible solutions. The success of the project to date suggests a sociological and psychological expertise rarely seen, heard, or felt.

Brown's paper was an in-depth look from a social system perspective at the

adaptation struggles of Southeast Asian women refugees. The author discussed four phases of adjustment (Phase 1—predeparture, Phase 2—the spectator phase, Phase 3—the adaptive phase, and Phase 4—the “coming to terms” phase) that these women go through emigrating from their country to a successful relocation within the United States. The presentation was not only informative but also gave to the audience a sociological framework to better understand the struggle. Brown presented recollections from the women themselves about the hardships in readjustment. These comments brought a personal touch and added meaning to the entire presentation. Overall, Brown integrated the theoretical with the personal, resulting in a truly educational experience.

Irby's and Pon's paper was an in-depth portrayal of the psychological hardships suffered by Southeast Asian refugees in the United States. Their uprootedness was not voluntary but rather as a direct consequence of America's involvement in the Vietnam conflict. The psychological trauma that resulted was pervasive, affecting all areas of their adjustment. In this regard, difficulties were reported in such areas as culture shock, language, religion, family structure, status, racism, and employment. The results of this psychological scarring were traumatic: reports of severe depression and suicide, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, family discord, anxiety, fear, anger, and substance abuse are well documented. The presenters emphasized that solutions to these problems are not easy. However, one thing is very clear: the United States has a moral obligation and responsibility to assist both the Hmong and Mien in their new adjustment. This assistance may be a variety of forms: mental health intervention, job training, or education. The important issue is that the United States severely disrupted the entire Hmong and Mien society of Southeast Asia and thus should initiate an active commitment of assistance.

## **SESSION XII: Identity and Community**

Chair: Margaret Laughlin, University of Wisconsin, Green Bay

### **Dorothy Balancio, Mercy College. “The Making and Unmaking of a Myth: The Italian American Women and Their Community**

This research addresses how Italian American Women see themselves and their community. Input from three generations of women: the immigrant grandmothers, their children, and grandchildren is investigated. The biographies of these women from the three cohorts suggest a wide range of differences, but also spotlight intra-generational similarities. The first generation grandmothers were the ruptured group between two cultures: the rural, peasant Southern Italian culture and the Urban American culture. The study begins with a description of the images of Italian American women as presented in novels, films, and on television, and ends by showing them as achievers.

### **Gloria Eive, Italian American Historical Society/WCR. “Italians in the West: Music, Culture and the Role of Women”**

Field studies among Italian Americans in California indicate the maintenance of living oral traditions in their lives contributes significantly to their feelings of ethnic identity. Of these oral traditions, music (specifically, “Musica Popolare”) is particularly important. There is a distinction between “men's” and “women's” repertoires in content and function. The men's repertoire is more “public” and “popular” and the women's more “private,” although they share a “neutral” repertoire of songs identified today as “traditional.” Women bear the responsibility for maintaining the culture. Music functions in this context to impart moral, ethical and social values and also to provide continuity between generations and between the “old” and “new” cultures.

**Respondent:** Norman L. Friedman, California State University, Los Angeles.

Balancio and Eive have quite a bit in common, of course—Italian-American women—especially in regard to earlier generation ones. What I like about Eive's paper is that her research on folk and popular music provides a sound foundation for more sound interpretations about ethnicity than just what one can obtain from customary interviewee comments. Songs and dances recalled from over many years are real and concrete indicators of ethnicity, not fuzzy ones. The cautious interpretations she does make about their functions in festivals, socialization, definitions of propriety (in the bawdy songs), mate choice, and subcommunity ties, seem well grounded in relation to the music.

Balancio's total research project, apparently still ongoing, involving 38 family groups, 3 generations, and 255 people in oral histories and interviews, will probably when completed be a major contribution to our knowledge about the history and sociology of Italian American women. It is difficult to react to, however, in its current written form. Nevertheless, many of the ideas suggested are fascinating, such as the notion that Italian American women preserve and outwardly project a mythical ideal family image to outsiders (of service, powerlessness, passivity) that is often not the reality of their internal family lives.

Of course, we can also see and draw some linkages between Balancio and Eive's early generation women, even though they came from different parts of Italy and went to different places in the United States. Both maintained ethnic community and culture (including music) while also dealing with two diverse cultures (the old and new worlds) and subsequent sibling-bonded family life. How their women and music might connect in the more recent generations, though, is less clear. Moreover, are the younger women, now and into the future, undergoing a genuine and deep "resurgence of ethnicity," or mainly continuing a more-or-less "straight-line assimilation" of their group?