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## Book Reviews

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Larson, Reed and Richards, Maryse, H. (1994), *Divergent realities: The emotional lives of mothers, fathers, and adolescents*, New York, BasicBooks, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., ISBN 0-465-01662-6, \$26.00, 333 pp.

Since the Reagan era, the issue of "family values," or rather the call to return to family values, has been the cornerstone of the conservative movement in the United States. The phrase family values often conjures up images of June, Ward and Beaver Cleaver; the omnipotent, omniscient dad on "Father Knows Best;" and a smiling, happy-go-lucky mother figure in the form of Donna Reed. Indeed, these icons of popular culture have come to represent the "ideal," well-adjusted family in America: a "stay-at-home" mother, a full-time working "outside the home" father and 2.5 (or more) well-behaved, well-heeled, European American children. Invoking a contemporary version of this mythology of the American "family," Reed Larson and Maryse H. Richards focused on those individuals (people of European-American, working and middle-upper class descent) whose lives "embody" all to which we should, individually and collectively, aspire. "The ideal of the happy, middle-class, two-parent family is what most people aspire to; it is their standard for family life" (p. 9). They rationalized the need for such a study because "these are families that should be functioning well, yet show surprisingly many signs of distress" (p. 9). Herein lies the essence of the book: it is less a book about "divergent realities" than it is a book about the emergent, ironic realities of the mothers, fathers and adolescents and the relationship dynamics among and between them.

In 1987, the authors conducted a research project with 483 young adolescents, fifth to ninth graders from working-class, middle and upper-middle class suburbs of Chicago, and expanded the study to include 55 mother-father-adolescent triads. The authors used the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) and at the end of one week, separate interviews were conducted with each of the 55 family members.

In part one of the book, the authors focus on individual realities of fathers, mothers and adolescents—What do these individuals do throughout the day? What do they think about? and How do they feel? Part two focuses on relationships between fathers and mothers, mothers and adolescents and fathers and adolescents. The last part of the book addresses the global issue of "families," those considered to be "troubled" and those considered to be "healthy." What then is the result of the 24,000 "snapshots" of daily life which were accumulated from the adolescents and the families who participated in this study?

If this book were a 5" × 7" snapshot, this is what we would see: a picture of the daily lives of European-American working and middle-class families in

which "mothers take on the 'burden of care' " (p. 120); . . . "the dominant spouse [typically male] 'sprays' his or her anxiety at other family members" (p. 193); and we would also see that "adolescents are more emotional than their parents" (p. 82). After reading this book, I came away with some very distinct images of the mothers, fathers and adolescents who participated in this research project. Mothers who do not work outside of the home and who are not involved in activities apart from caring for their families and/or their homes are overly dependent on their spouses and children for their emotional well-being. Additionally, these mothers have trouble separating work in the house from their leisure and do not seem to experience the same level of enjoyment that their spouses do in similar activities (e.g., sports, games, family outings). Fathers typically work too much, show too little emotion and what emotion they do show often has a negative effect on those around them (most notably their spouses and children); fathers believe they are entitled to leisure because they work so diligently outside of the home and they take too little responsibility for their relationships with individuals within their families. These fathers are more likely to enjoy their household work and childcare (when they do it) than their spouses, primarily because they perceive that their involvement in these activities involves "choice." Adolescents are disempowered by the institutions which control their lives—school, family, etc.—and they must deal with competing demands on their time and with fluctuating emotions<sup>1</sup> and feelings. Although older adolescents spend more and more of their time (often within leisure contexts) away from home, the authors found that, despite petty arguments and annoyances, home was an area of comfort for young people.

This summary is, of course, a gross oversimplification of the book, but it does illustrate the extent to which the authors, in an attempt to adequately "represent" the lives of the participants, may have undertaken a task which was too broad and too large for the scope of one volume. Although I am not suggesting a sequel *per se*, I imagine that the authors probably had enough data to write several books about the mothers, the fathers and the adolescents and/or a book about the relationships between mothers and fathers, mothers and adolescents and/or fathers and adolescents *vis-a-vis* their daily lives and experiences. The book contains chapters on each of these sections, but we do not hear the voices of *all* of the participants—we hear from those that the authors selectively chose who presumably are representative of the majority.

The overall message of this book is found in this irony: the more traditional the family (i.e., the more individual members embrace the stereotypes of June and Ward Cleaver), the more likely it is that this family will exhibit signs of distress among individuals and across relationships. Con-

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<sup>1</sup>Is it really that adolescents are "more" emotional than adults, as the authors suggest, or is it that adults are less emotional than adolescents because we "have had more opportunity to become hardened and desensitized to the slings and arrows of daily life?" (p. 103).

versely, those families in which the mothers worked and/or volunteered part-time outside of the home and in which fathers were more willing to assume responsibility for the care of the home and of children, were more likely to be "healthy." Betty Friedan, Marilyn French, Gloria Steinam and others told us this a long time ago—so what makes this book unique and what is its relevance to leisure researchers?

The book is unique because the authors used a combination of Experience Sampling Method and interviews to capture the thoughts, emotions and feelings of European-American, working and middle-upper class mothers, fathers and adolescents within the context of their work and leisure during a one-week period in 1987. Its central value is that it is an historical text which documents the lives of one segment of American life during one social/historical/political moment in time. The book is also valuable because the authors explicitly address the issue of "leisure" in the lives of mothers, fathers and adolescents. For the many family and adolescent studies researchers who will pick up this book, it is my hope that they find the authors' discussions of leisure to be enlightening. Although leisure researchers may find some of the discussions of leisure to be redundant (e.g., women are constrained in their leisure within the context of home and men feel more entitlement to leisure than women because they work outside of the home), they will, nevertheless, find the book helpful because it provides insight into the intimacies and complexities of individuals within family contexts. The authors conclude that "collective family well-being depends not on fixed role assignments, but rather on flexible processes . . ." (p. 219). Such a conclusion might be helpful to leisure theorists as they conceptualize and conduct research about the topic of family. Perhaps leisure researchers could also embrace the authors' suggestion to replicate this study across many different kinds of families—African-American, lesbian/gay, single-parent. Although it is unclear what such studies might reveal, Larson and Richards have, nevertheless, provided us with a framework from which to begin a process of understanding the "emotional lives" of individuals within the context of family.

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Lopata, Helena Z. (1996). *Current widowhood: Myths and realities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, ISBN 0-8039-7396-9, \$21.95 (paperback), \$44.00 (cloth), pp. 251.

"Widows are probably one of the most misunderstood groups in America today" (Lieberman, 1994, no page number) in spite of the fact that they make up over 11% of the female population. The loss of a husband, more than any other loss, profoundly disorganizes a married woman's life. It brings about fundamental disruptions in her emotional life, removes key relation-