

9-2001

Not to People Like Us: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages – Book Review

Kristin L. Anderson

Western Washington University, kristin.anderson@wwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/sociology_facpubs



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Anderson, Kristin L., "Not to People Like Us: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages – Book Review" (2001). *Sociology*. 4.
https://cedar.wwu.edu/sociology_facpubs/4

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social and Behavioral Sciences at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.



CHICAGO JOURNALS

"Not to People Like Us": Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages by Susan Weitzman
"Not to People Like Us": Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages by Susan Weitzman
Review by: Kristin L. Anderson
American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 107, No. 2 (September 2001), pp. 545-547
Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/343187>
Accessed: 27/10/2014 14:26

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to
American Journal of Sociology.

<http://www.jstor.org>

“Not to People Like Us”: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages. By Susan Weitzman. New York: Basic Books, 2000. Pp. v+289. \$26.00.

Kristin L. Anderson
Western Washington University

The notion that abuse is not limited to a particular class or racial/ethnic group is almost a cliché in feminist scholarship on men’s violence against intimate partners. Recent work has acknowledged a need to go beyond this claim to study the interacting ways in which class, race/ethnicity, and gender inequalities influence partner assaults. Unfortunately, this analysis of abuse within “upscale” relationships will not help scholars who want to learn about the ways in which class matters to the experience of battery. Instead of examining the influence of class privilege on women’s choices and experiences, Weitzman makes a contradictory and unsupported “reverse discrimination” argument in *“Not to People Like Us”: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages*. She posits that material wealth and professional opportunities lead to discrimination against upper-class victims of abuse: “The myth [that abuse occurs only among lower classes] becomes a type of institutionalized oppression for the upscale” (p. 8). Weitzman’s data include 14 retrospective interviews with women who either left their part-

545

ners or ended the violence in their relationships, and she uses their stories to support her claim that upper-class women are unjustly oppressed by stereotypes about class and violence. However, the data presented here suggest that the problem is not that others refuse to see privileged women as victims, but that the respondents' own class prejudices keep them from seeking help. Weitzman describes only one incident in which a respondent was refused help from a domestic violence agency, but she repeatedly quotes her respondents' statements that they are "too intelligent" to be abused and that they "could never" go to a shelter. In a similarly contradictory fashion, Weitzman claims that "upscale" women are rejected by women's shelters, but also notes that her respondents did not utilize shelters because they could afford to stay at hotels or buy plane tickets when they wanted to leave.

The book is organized in six chapters that trace the "paths" in and out of violent relationships. There are also chapters on the characteristics of the "upscale" batterer and the impact of domestic violence on children. A number of problems with data analysis and interpretation weaken these chapters. First, although Weitzman's sample included only women with high levels of income and education, she makes unwarranted comparisons to the experiences of poor and working-class women. For example, she contends that lower-class women are less likely to encounter feelings of shame, isolation, or fear of being disbelieved by others than upper-class women, although these experiences are commonly reported in the literature on violence survivors. This approach, combined with her use of the term "upscale violence," serves to recreate the class divisions that Weitzman purportedly wants to challenge. An analysis of race and its intersections with class is notably absent; race is mentioned only to mark a single African-American respondent. Second, in an effort to avoid framing her respondents as helpless victims, Weitzman grants them the status of free agents by using a language of "choice" and "collusion." A more nuanced analysis of structure and agency would help to avoid the victim-blaming statements that run through these chapters. Finally, although she notes that narratives are shifting accounts through which people make meaning of their experiences, Weitzman reads the data backward to identify "warning signals" for abuse. She claims that the majority of her respondents identified signs of their prospective husbands' abusive behavior prior to marriage, but "chose" to ignore these signals even when they were "thoroughly forewarned" (p. 69).

The final two substantive chapters, which offer guidelines for therapists and professionals working with abuse victims and survivors, are the strongest of the book. Weitzman's discussion of the difficulties encountered by therapists in working with abuse is interesting and persuasive. She offers thoughtful analyses of the debates about individual versus couple therapy and whether a decision to stay in the relationship can be empowering for women. There are also glimmers of a class analysis here. For example, Weitzman describes the ways in which economically priv-

ileged men can utilize the courts to harass partners who have left the relationship.

Weitzman's audience is clearly other "upscale" therapists and their clients. She notes that this work has been challenged because it does not address class privilege, but dismisses such criticisms as the result of "envy of those with wealth" and the way in which her work threatens the "comfort zone that many of us choose to live in" (p. 7). For sociologists seeking a theoretically informed analysis of class and race locations and battery, I recommend James Ptacek's recent comparative study of domestic violence courtrooms in a predominantly working-class and poor district and a middle- and working-class district (*Battered Women in the Courtroom: The Power of Judicial Responses* [Northeastern University Press, 1999]).

Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community. By Sarah M. Pike. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001. Pp. xxvi+288. \$50.00 (cloth); \$19.95 (paper).

Marion Goldman
University of Oregon

In *Earthly Bodies Magical Selves*, Sarah Pike guides readers through contemporary neopagan festival gatherings in the United States. Throughout the 1990s, Pike attended festivals in California and New York, but she was most involved in gatherings in the Midwest because of their convenience to her graduate program at Indiana University. She also participated in local Sunday night ritual groups for two years, interviewed central figures on the neopagan festival circuit, and sent out an unspecified number of E-mail questionnaires.

Pike relished her personal and scholarly discoveries, weaving among participant and observer roles in conversations, rituals, and her own self-reflections. In a brief, contemplative section in her preface, Pike notes "I have been transformed by my experiences in Neopagan communities, and this transformation is surely reflected in the way I tell their stories" (p. xvi).

According to Pike, neopagans reshape past traditions in order to invent meaningful communities and create personal spiritualities. Annual festivals facilitate their engagement in the process of self-transformation within a space made sacred by virtue of being set apart from everyday life in terms of both location and also social relations. Some neopagans term their nonfestival routines "mundania" and long for occasions allowing them to step away from their everyday routines.

Pike's vivid, entertaining descriptions allow readers to consider the ways in which neopagans construct and reorganize their self-identities within festival contexts. She asserts that neopagans' constructions of self