

2014

Women on Ice: Methamphetamine Use among Suburban Women by Miriam Williams Boeri

David B. Broad
University of North Georgia

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr>

 Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Communication Commons](#), [Economics Commons](#), [Geography Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), and the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Broad, David B. (2014) "Women on Ice: Methamphetamine Use among Suburban Women by Miriam Williams Boeri," *International Social Science Review*: Vol. 89: Iss. 1, Article 6.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr/vol89/iss1/6>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Social Science Review by an authorized administrator of Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository.

Boeri, Miriam Williams. *Women on Ice: Methamphetamine Use among Suburban Women*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013. xvii + 233 pages. Paper, \$27.95.

This is an extremely difficult book to read—not because it is poorly written, but precisely because it is written so well. The stories of these women are gut-wrenching. Sociologist Miriam Williams Boeri sets out to study an almost invisible group of women and really accomplishes much more than that. This study is a window on an America produced by suburbanization, patriarchy, and social class division. What emerges from this candid, engaged, and detailed study is a picture of how a marginalized population is produced by the convergence of those forces. The author applies a wide variety of appropriate theoretical models from sociology, including Howard Becker's resilient idea of the drug career, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital, Erving Goffman's interaction ritual, the Thomas Theorem (that what is believed to be real is real in its consequences) and a rich ethnographic tool-kit of typologies and middle-range theoretical models that give her data coherence and meaningful context.

Boeri describes a social landscape that she calls post-modern suburbia. This is not the stereotypical suburbia of homogeneous middle-class blandness and security. It is a new and much more complex social landscape possibly the result of the expanding ring of suburbs around cities encroaching on existing rural culture. This has left pockets of typically rural poverty encircled by more typically middle-class sprawl. Such pockets are significant structural features of the post-modern suburbia, in which most of these stories take place. Exacerbating the structural features that support meth use in post-modern suburbia is the recent Great Recession. Lives that were already marginal plummet into desperation in such times.

Each chapter of this book begins with the name of an individual ethnographic subject and her story. This gives the book an accessible empirical grounding. These are often followed by related stories and then a theoretical concept that gives the stories broader context. Then additional stories are told, with the theoretical concepts already integrated into them. This is a masterful approach to the wedding of theory and data to which the social sciences aspire. For example, having introduced Bourdieu's idea of social capital and how it can be manifested through bonding (relationships within groups) and bridging (relationships across group lines), Boeri describes how subjects relate to each other to produce bonds and with "mainstream" social entities to produce bridges. Methodology is also woven continuously through this volume. The author explains what she and her collaborators did at every stage and for every facet of the study. A more detailed methods chapter is appended, but there is more than enough explanation of how these stories were obtained in the chapters in which they are told to make the reader feel very present in them.

The universal significance of class structure and the utility of class analysis are not lost in this volume. That is one of the great values of the focus of this research on post-modern suburbia where the classes live in closer social proximity with one another. In the city, the classes may live within yards of one another, but social distance is maintained. In what we might now call "classical suburbia," homogeneity is the rule. In post-modern suburbia the social capital bridges can be crossed in either direction – toward the mainstream or toward the drug underculture.

A chapter on policy implications makes the importance of a work like this clear. We are, after all, our brother's (or in this case our sister's) keeper. That our laws, policies, and social structure predict that people will fall through the cracks as is so graphically described in this volume must be addressed.

Boeri outlines six specific ways that the problems she witnessed can be treated: by harm-reduction, social recovery, on-demand treatment, peer-driven housing, female-initiated programs, and transformative justice. Encouragingly, these ideas are the focus of the Report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, authored by many distinguished and high-ranking leaders from many nations and many sectors of world social structure in 2011.

David B. Broad, Ph.D.
Professor of Sociology
University of North Georgia
Dahlonega, Georgia