Comprehensive Exam in Religion and Family (Day 2, Fall 2007)

Please address one of the following two questions

1) If NIH awarded you “whatever money it took” to conduct the best survey of religion and family-related behavior in the United States to date, what would be the key features of your survey (that is how could it improve on and extend what currently exists)? Describe a sampling frame (i.e., who would you target and why?), a research design (e.g., what longitudinal or multilevel features might you build in, and why?), and key areas of content. Relate these choices to relevant literature in the area. What research questions could such a project hope to address that cannot easily be answered with existing data? What would be limitations of the research even with your ideal design? Which three outside (non-UT) scholars might you bring aboard the research team? Justify these choices based on the expertise and added value they would bring to the project.

2) You have been invited to organize a major session on religion and family for the annual meetings of the National Council on Family Relations. There is much planning to be done. Please identify: (a) four major issues or topics you would want to have presented to NCFR attendees; (b) four leading scholars you would invite to conduct presentations on these topics (one for each topic), and what the specific features or foci of their talks might be – and why you would choose them; (c) which backup choices you have in mind (in case the A list falls through); and (d) a discussant who would have adequate breadth and expertise to connect these talks and offer criticisms and suggestions – and why you would select him or her. Given the current state of the field, why are these issues crucial for sociologist of religion and the family to think about now.

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3) Individuals who are high in self-identified religiosity are less likely to divorce and are more likely to have high quality marriages than persons with little or no religiosity. However in the US, states in which the population as a whole is unusually religious have higher divorce rates and lower average self-reported marital quality than states that rank lower in religiosity. Discuss possible reasons for this paradox and describe what kind of research might be conducted to make sense of it.


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5) Much has been written lately about changes in gender roles, husband-wife relationship expectations, parent-child relationships, and the “new fatherhood.” Describe in some detail recent research conclusions about these and in particular to the unique role of religion (measured in a variety of ways) in each of these substantive areas.

6) There is emerging evidence to suggest that the relationship between religion and family outcomes of a variety of sorts is certainly bi-directional. Describe in some detail arguments about the influence of family measures (e.g., family structure, cohabitation, etc.) on religious practice, affiliation, and switching.