

## ***Alice S. Rossi, Sociologist and Feminist Scholar, Dies at 87***

By [Margalit Fox](#) Nov. 7, 2009

Alice S. Rossi, a noted sociologist and feminist scholar who was [a founder of the National Organization for Women](#), died on Tuesday in Northampton, Mass. She was 87 and lived in Amherst, Mass.

The cause was pneumonia, her son, Peter E. Rossi, said.

At her death, Professor Rossi was the Harriet Martineau professor of sociology emeritus at the University of Massachusetts, where she had taught from 1974 until her retirement in 1991.

In her scholarship, Professor Rossi explored the status of women in work, family and sexual life. An early public advocate of abortion rights, she was often quoted by the national news media on an array of women's issues. Her writings are widely credited with helping build the platform on which the women's movement of the 1960s and afterward was erected.

Professor Rossi was best known for her studies of people's lives — those of women in particular — as they move from youth to age. She edited several books on the subject, including "Gender and the Life Course" (Aldine, 1985); "Sexuality Across the Life Course" (University of Chicago, 1994); and "Caring and Doing for Others: Social Responsibility in the Domains of Family, Work and Community" (University of Chicago, 2001).

One of her most influential feminist articles was "Equality Between the Sexes: An Immodest Proposal." First presented in 1963 at a meeting of [the American Academy of Arts and Sciences](#), it was published the next year in the academy's journal [Daedalus](#).



Alice S. RossiCredit...Peter H. Rossi, 1968

In the article, Professor Rossi argued that for most women motherhood had become a full-time occupation, a state of affairs that hurt not only women but also the larger society in which they lived. For the well-being of both the women and the culture, she wrote, parity of the sexes is essential.

Familiar today, Professor Rossi's argument was considered subversive at the time. As a result, [she was called a monster, an unnatural woman and an unfit mother](#), as she recalled in interviews afterward. Her article can be found in the anthology "Life Cycle and Achievement in America" (Harper & Row, 1969), edited by Rose Laub Coser.

In later work, also controversial, Professor Rossi argued that the cultural divide between men and women was not the product of socialization alone, as the prevailing view held, but was partly rooted in inborn biological differences between the sexes.

Alice Emma Schaerr was born in Brooklyn on Sept. 24, 1922. She earned a bachelor's degree from Brooklyn College and, in 1957, a Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia. Her doctoral dissertation, "Generational Differences in the Soviet Union," was published in book form by Arno Press in 1980.

A past president of [the American Sociological Association](#), Professor Rossi held appointments at Harvard, the University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins University and Goucher College before joining the Massachusetts faculty. With a group that included Betty Friedan, she founded NOW in 1966.

Professor Rossi's first marriage ended in divorce; she married Peter H. Rossi in 1951. Mr. Rossi, also a prominent sociologist, died in 2006. Besides her son, Peter, an economist at the University of Chicago, Professor Rossi is survived by two daughters, Kristin Rossi of Keene, N.H., and Nina Rossi of Turners Falls, Mass.; and six grandchildren.

Among her other books are "The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir" (Columbia University, 1973), which she edited; "Of Human Bonding: Parent-Child Relations Across the Life Course" (de Gruyter, 1990), which she wrote with her husband; and "Seasons of a Woman's Life: A Self-Reflective Essay on Love and Work in Family, Profession, and Politics," published as a slender volume by the University of Massachusetts in 1983.