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"WOMAN" AS SYMBOL AND SOCIAL WELFARE: AN INTERACTIONIST PERSPECTIVE[*]

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ABSTRACT

    Symbolic interactionism is used to examine the variable and complex defini-
tions now linked to the symbol "woman" in contemporary society. The implications
of symbolic interactionism and the view of "woman" as symbol for social welfare
are discussed in terms of knowledge, morality, and implementation.

    Although there certainly have been some important exceptions (e.g., Thomas,
1923; Pollak, 1950; Komarovsky, 1967), viewed in a historical perspective, sociolo-
gists, for whatever reasons, have failed to give sufficient attention to "woman."
As recent as 1973 Bernard (1973:782) concluded "Practically all sociology to date
has been a sociology of the male world." Many of those who accept this point of
view have emphasized the impact of this deficiency upon our understanding of
broader societal processes outside the family. This is understandable because "As
measured by sheer volume, most of the traditional research on women has been in
the sociology of the family (Bart 1971), and most of that concerns middle-class
white women as housewives, college students, and professional workers" (Hochschild,
1973a:1011). Huber (1973a:764) concludes, for instance, that "Women are discussed
as part of family and almost never as part of market institutions." Acker (1973:
936) observes that "The inclusion of the female half of humanity and of sex as a
central dimension in the study of society would lead to a more accurate picture of
social structure and to a better understanding of process." The reverse, however,
is also true. Knowledge of the "woman's" role within the family and of the family,
itself, must be reevaluated as insights into the effects of the female status upon
the broader society increase. In other words, attention must be given to "woman"
for the understanding of familial as well as extrafamilial processes.

    While recognizing that there are various perspectives and data-gathering
strategies for enhancing our knowledge about "woman," we believe that basic to all
of these is a need for a more explicit and systematic recognition of the symbolic
status of "woman" and of the methodologies required for the implementation of such
a view. Some have questioned the merit of the survey emphasis in sex-role research
(Hochschild, 1973a:1011-1012) and the male science view of society dominant within
sociology, with its stress on quantitative or agentic techniques (Bernard, 1973:
787). There is clearly a need for a different and systematic approach to the study
of "woman." While this approach must allow for a scientific view of "woman," it
must also consider the everyday world of "woman." Denzin (1970:9-10) has empha-
sized the need for this dual perspective for the study of all social phenomena.

"Women" are involved in ongoing interactions and are defined, and define themselves, in relation to those with whom they interact. These are matters that cannot be taken for granted.

     This paper presents a rationale for explicitly recognizing the symbolic character of "woman" and argues that there is a need to determine both the consistency as well as the variation in the individual and common meanings that are associated with the symbol "woman." Unless this is done, the development of theoretical insights as well as principles of human interaction involving women will likely be improbable. Without this kind of theoretical sustenance, methodological stance and the valuable information this overall strategy can produce, efforts to understand the changing role of women and efforts to change the status of women in our society are doomed to flounder and to be a hit and miss proposition.

     We contend that there are at least five positive consequences that flow from the recognition of the symbolic character of "woman." Recognition of this symbolic character brings into focus the following areas: (1) meaning of "woman," (2) "woman" as a complex symbol, (3) an interactionist theoretical perspective of "woman," (4) methodological strategies in the study of female socialization, and (5) the character of female socialization. In the final section we consider the implications of the view of "woman" as symbol for the field of social welfare.

MEANING OF "WOMAN"

     Human beings live in a symbolic universe and do not confront reality directly (Cassirer, 1944:25). "Woman" is part of that symbolic universe. "Woman" is a symbol. But since a symbol stands for something else (Vernon, 1972:62),[1] what in fact does "woman" stand for in twentieth century America? This question is easily posed; due however, to the arbitrary nature of symbols (Warriner, 1970:61), and the dramatic changes and conflicts in the interpretation of the meaning of "woman," it is not easily answered. Clearly, the meaning of "woman" is problematic.

     The meaning of "woman" in America today, however, is resolvable. The formation of the question and the explicit and systematic recognition of the symbolic character of "woman" are vital first steps. Beyond this, there is a need to understand the symbolic complexity of "woman" and to this end, to develop the appropriate perspectives and methodologies. A more fundamental point, one that flows directly from the recognition of the variable meaning of "woman" is now considered. To say that the meaning of "woman" varies among individuals and groups is tantamount to saying that "woman" is a "sensitizing concept" (Blumer, 1954, 1969). Blumer (1954:8) contends that there are no strict generic concepts in the social sciences since their expression in the "real world" is always dependent upon the situation. The fact that "woman" is a "sensitizing concept" has extensive implications. Investigators can no longer routinely assign a common meaning to "woman." It means that investigators must explore and inspect the empirical world before operationalizing "woman" (Blumer, 1969:42-47; Denzin, 1970:14). Suspicion is unquestionably cast upon any studies that routinely assume that a sexual classifi-

cation actually _means_ something. While it can be argued that sexual classifications reflect only gender distinctions and no more, or that they are valuable in making population projections, it is clear that gender distinctions do not themselves tap the symbolic meanings attached to "woman." In a time when the symbol "woman" conjures up such variable meaning, any neglect of this feature cannot be taken lightly.

SYMBOLIC COMPLEXITY OF "WOMAN"

"Symbols - and the meanings and values to which they refer - do not occur in isolated bits, but often in clusters, sometimes large and complex." (Rose, 1962: 10) Symbols are complex in that they involve multiple meanings and have a relational quality. The relational quality of "marihuana," for example, has been shown to involve peddlers, morality, friends, and numerous other symbols (Schmitt and Grupp, 1973). Regarding multiple meanings, each symbol is characterized by both common and unique meanings. The former are patterned by the symbolic heritage of a society, while the latter develop as the result of the individual's personal experience with these common meanings within his own symbolic world, the world of his experience. Societies' symbolic heritage is not, of course, characterized by complete symbolic uniformity through the society. Shibutani (1955) stresses that mass societies are characterized by _many_ "social worlds," that is, by categories of persons with shared perspectives. Although these variable "social worlds" may concern the "same" symbol, a symbol does not necessarily conjure up the _same_ meaning. The symbol, God, has quite a different meaning for atheists, agnostics and Christians.

"Woman" is indeed a complex symbol. Compared to earlier days when the symbol "woman" was complex though probably less so than today, now there are a multitude of meanings pertaining to "woman," and "social worlds" holding these meanings are marked by diversity and volatility. Paralleling this there has been an increase in the relational quality of the symbol, "woman." The concept "woman" is now associated in a variety of ways with such diverse areas and issues as equality, sports, freedom in sex, the changing rules of beauty contests, abortion, minority groups and with an increasing number of occupations. In sum, today "Woman" means many different things to different people and even within the same person there is commonly, considerable variation regarding the meaning of "woman."

While the degree of complexity of "woman" has been intensified today, the exact make-up of the common and unique meanings associated with "woman" is not known. Systematic research is needed to directly address these questions. The specific content of the common and unique meanings associated with "woman," the interplay between these meanings, their contradictory and evaluative components, the identity of the groups and individuals that hold particular meanings, the relation between situational factors and selected meanings about "woman," are yet to be identified. The relational quality of "woman," of course, also needs to be studied.

The preceding questions will most likely be answered by examining the conscious meanings associated with the symbol "woman." It should, however, be recognized that man does relate to symbols in ways other than a cognitive manner. Emotions, for example, are a part of both cognitive and noncognitive processes. Given the feeling generated in some quarters today by the question, "what is a woman?" the emotional dimension of symbols in this area must be acknowledged.

"WOMAN" IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

How should the social scientist study "woman?" Since "woman" is a symbol, the approach chosen should take special cognizance of this fact. There are several areas that do this, including symbolic interactionism (SI), ethnoscience, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology. The study of "woman" could profit from the insights of all these perspectives. We believe, however, that the SI perspective, as a sociologically oriented social psychology, is especially meritorious for the study of "woman" as symbol. (1) SI has traditionally been concerned with the dimensional aspects of symbols (see Lindesmith et al., 1975). (2) SI is a perspective and as such has the potential for both innovation and broad utilization (Schmitt, 1974). (3) The SI's have related their methods to their theory (see below). (4) SI has proved useful in the study of the family (e.g., Stryker, 1972). (5) SI is the most sociological of all social psychologies (Manis and Meltzer, 1972:577).

An incontestable inheritance of the Meadian legacy is that human beings and "society" are interdependent, they are two sides of the same coin. SI's are, of course, keenly sensitized to the significance of language, the emergent and situational aspects of interaction, and the self (see Rose, 1962; Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1970; Schmitt, 1972).[2] In other words, SI recognizes the importance of (1) the reality of the external symbolic world - those common meanings that protrude upon ongoing interactions, (2) the reality of the individual's experiences and interpretative capacities, and (3) the reality of the symbolic worlds that emerge from the experiences of individuals. Although it has been alleged that some symbolic interactionists have emphasized the phenomenological side of human behavior (see Douglas, 1970:17-18), SI's have been largely concerned with explaining the interconnections between these three realities.[3]

Given these characteristics, it is apparent that the SI perspective, is of inestimable value in the study of "woman." "Woman" - or any other symbol, cannot be understood unless systematic attention is given to our symbolic heritage, that is, the diversity of common meanings or "social worlds," to the experiences of individuals with these common meanings, and to the involvement of man's symbolic heritage in the personal symbolic worlds of individuals. Only when these areas are attended to, can the nature, dynamics, and complexities of the symbol "woman" be explained.

RESEARCH STRATEGIES AND "WOMAN"

SI's have directed attention to various aspects of the research process that should prove beneficial to the study of "woman." Using Blumer's notion of the "sensitizing concept" we have argued that the concept "woman" has a symbolic

character and have indicated the implications of this recognition. The symbolic interactionist has, of course, always stressed the importance of the "actor's perspective" and has recommended the use of data gathering techniques that maximize this dictum. These and other methodological implications of SI have been synthesized into seven interactionist-methodological principles (Denzin, 1970) and a naturalistic strategy (Denzin, 1971). Denzin emphasizes that investigators should strive for formal theory and use research methods that combine symbols and interactions, the actor's and the scientist's perspective, and include the situational and the relational aspects of social behavior. We believe that these methodological directives can be more effectively used if the symbolic nature of "woman" is underscored.

The make-up of the actor's perspective - his symbolic world, and the basic strategy necessary to tap this world are primary considerations. In our view the actor's symbolic world represents the most fundamental sociological datum that must be considered. Unfortunately, SI has not fully capitalized on its distinctive insights regarding the significance and make-up of the actor's symbolic world. Our view of the actor's symbolic world has immediate implications for the study of "woman."

The actor's symbolic world is the individual's experientially-based view of his own person and of other social objects. This conceptualization relates the individual's symbolic world to his personal experiences with external symbolic reality. It is necessary to do this if "woman" is to be understood. SI's have frequently emphasized the processual aspects of the self, particularly the view that the self is internal conversation, emergent, presented, and situational, but have not sufficiently emphasized its content. In other words, they have failed to relate the self to man's symbolic heritage.

Since it holds the key to the actor's three realities, the actor's symbolic world is a pivotal variable. The content of the actor's symbolic world must be circumscribed if the make-up of his symbolic world is to be understood, if the actor's ongoing experiences are to be grasped, and if the consensual aspects of man's symbolic heritage are to be outlined. Although it is a complex issue, it appears that a determination of consensually based-meanings requires a delineation of individual meanings. Douglas (1967:253-4) has taken this position with respect to suicide.

How can the symbolic world best be tapped? We recommend an open-end strategy. The individual must be given an opportunity to fully and openly describe his salient experiences with the external world. The specific nature of the open-end question(s) is not fixed. Our preference, however, is the Twenty Statements Test Format, or as we prefer to label it, the Social Object Protocol (SOP). This instrument can be used in interview or questionnaire type studies and in more naturalistic type settings (see Denzin, 1971). The SOP has been examined exhaustively elsewhere.[4] The SOP format has a theoretical basis (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954), has benefited from review and criticism (Spitzer et al., 1971), and has recently been successfully used in studies of reference others (Moore et al., 1973), marihuana

(Schmitt and Grupp, 1973), death (Bakshis et al., 1974) and has recently been suggested as a useful instrument for measuring alleged changes in the self that are primarily grounded in the biological-emotional aspects of man (Turner, 1976). An application of the Social Object Protocol to the study of "woman" could simply involve asking the question, "What is a Woman?"

It should be emphasized that the open-end strategy being discussed here can be employed in studies that are, as Denzin (1971) depicts them, truly naturalistic. The form of the "woman" question might vary somewhat, however, depending on circumstances, or a series of open-end questions and responses might emerge in the dialogue. There is evidence that the imaginative use of the open-end strategy in naturalistic contexts can be effectively used to "open up" aspects of symbolic worlds that might otherwise have been missed (see Schmitt et al., in press).

In further defense of our position on the SOP, it should also be noted that (1) the merits of the open-end strategy in interviewing has been acknowledged (Young, 1966:191), (2) these merits have been comparatively argued by impeccable methodologists (Campbell, 1957), (3) some ground-breaking studies have used the open-end approach (e.g., Simmons, 1965), (4) the advantage of volunteered over directed responses have been argued in other contexts, such as participant observation (see Becker et al., 1961:43-45), and (5) that forced-choice questions, while useful for many purposes, are too restrictive to tap the actor's symbolic world. It is precisely the voluntary, direct, and free-response characteristics (see Campbell, 1957) of the open-end format that enables it to identify the actor's symbolic world.[5]

The SOP should be of particular value in the study of "woman." The more complex the symbol - the more necessary and valuable the open-end strategy. Our recommendation that the SOP take the "What is a Woman?" form is only one possibility. The "woman" is also a female, and may be a housewife, a teacher, and many other things. But this, of course, is precisely the point of this paper! Until "woman" is studied by an "open-end" strategy, the manner in which "woman" is perceived in relation to the external symbolic world will remain an enigma.

The failure to recognize the symbolic character of "woman" is particularly evident in the stereotype literature on "woman" as a minority group and in the adjective-check lists that characterize this literature. These lists are the "anti-Christ" of the open-end strategy. The respondent is given a massive stimulus (studies frequently involve 100's of adjectives) and is denied the opportunity to be innovative in his response. Although this literature has been criticized (e.g., Triandis, 1971), the adjective-check list has never really been challenged. We do so now. If our recommendations are followed, we believe they will bear fruit.

<div align="center">GENERIC CHARACTER OF FEMALE SOCIALIZATION</div>

The symbolic character of "woman" draws attention to the facts that female socialization is not a distinctive type of socialization and that it must be studied within the context of general socialization theory. Scholars must be careful not

to allow the dramatic increase of interest in "women" among lay persons and scientists to generate a situation where female socialization is regarded as singular and unique. Female critics of the sociology literature have, in fact, alerted sociologists to aspects of female socialization previously overlooked, "highlighting especially the processes by which women are socialized for weakness, dependency, fear of success . . . , and even mild mental illness. . . ." (Bernard, 1973:779) But principles of female socialization must always be regarded as subservient to general socialization principles. Millman (1971), for instance, concludes from a literature review of some recent research on sex roles that most of it is limited to women's roles. In this regard, Hochschild (1973a:1022) has argued that research in this area needs to be explained.

We emphasize that female socialization should be studied from a theoretical and a comparative perspective. Hochschild (1973a:1022) is correct in her assertion that the increased interest in women "may make sociologists trim their generalizations to size; thus studies of social mobility will have to specify that they concern male social mobility, alienation, man's alienation." The ultimate objective, however, is to determine the factors underlying male and female socialization. The work of Gagnon and Simon (1973) in the area of sexual behavior illustrates the importance of a theoretical and comparative perspective. The inroads made by these writers into the understanding of sexual behavior have been largely due to their extrapolation of the study of sexual behavior from its limiting boundaries.

Reviewers of Gagnon and Simon's work, both those who applaud it and those who have found deficiencies in it, have centered attention on the success of these authors in lifting sexuality from a limiting framework. Schwartz (1975:135) was impressed with their ability to "bring a social psychological analysis to bear where previously only biological explanations had been given." Laws (1975:227), on the other hand, faults Simon and Gagnon for not moving far enough in integrating the subject of sexuality within a broader theoretical framework.

Our consideration of the symbolic quality of "woman" is now complete. This discussion brings into focus the implications of symbolic interactionism and its view of symbols for those having a theoretical or a pragmatic concern for women. An area that has historically shown such a concern is social welfare. The social welfarist has need for both theoretical and pragmatic insights. It is to a more explicit discussion of the potential of symbolic interactionism and its view of "woman" for the social welfarist that we now turn.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND SOCIAL WELFARE

Women are significant helping targets for welfarists. There are various ways in which interactionism has relevance for those who wish to help others. Interactionism, however, is an intellectual perspective. It will not resolve value issues. But application does presuppose knowledge. In other words, while one may understand but not act, one may not act without understanding. Unfortunately, application is not only a function of knowledge; a morality dimension is also involved. Values permeate welfare activities. Should welfare workers act as advocates of

women's rights? Should battered wives be helped against their will? Paradoxically, the objective of the "helping profession" is to help others, but its very end is unclear. It _is_ _not_ _easy_ _to_ _help_ _others_.

Knowledge and the Social Welfarist

Desirability of a Social
Psychological Image

The social welfarist necessarily functions on the basis of an image encompassing the individual and society. While these images vary and are more explicit in some periods than others (see Mencher, 1967), they are always present. Romanyshyn (1971:308) has recognized this and concluded that welfarists "require a more explicit model of man." Symbolic interactionism provides such a model. Women and men are seen as social as well as biological beings; interactionism has broad applicability, and it is a sociological social psychological perspective—interrelationships between the individual, his social interactions, and the shared meanings in the society are emphasized. The latter are the most lacking ingredients in the welfarist's images.

Although psychoanalytic "theory" is being joined by other approaches, in the social welfare field including learning theory, group theory, crisis theory, short-term theory, and others, these approaches suffer from the aforementioned deficiencies. Psychoanalytical theory is based on faulty assumptions and is an individualistic approach (see Lindesmith et al., 1975:275-279, 319-320). Approaches such as crisis theory (see Selby, 1969) may be effective for understanding and dealing with crisis situations, but they simply are not sufficiently generic or broad to deal with the issues that face the social welfarist in an increasingly complex society. Learning theories are too individualistic in that little attention is given to the context in which the individual emerges. For instance, although Saleebey (1976: 396) applauds Skinnerian psychology, he criticizes the behaviorists for their neglect of "many of the realities of social life," their neglect of the importance of power, institutional structures, and the "web of role networks in which we are all embedded." We would make a similar observation regarding Maslow's psychology even though Romanyshyn (1971:308-309) finds this to be the more explicit image of man needed by social welfarists.

The employment of a social psychological model in the study of society will enable the welfarist (1) to better understand the men and women that are being served by his profession and (2) to pinpoint problem areas. It is, for example, now clear that _internal_ _family_ _changes_ as well as industrialization and urbanization accounted for increases in womens' power in this country (Lantz et al., 1977). And, Oppenheimer (1977) has shown that a high and a low socioeconomic status for the wife can be a source of conflict within contemporary American family units.

Retention of
"Root Images"

The relationship between the individual and society is characterized by cer-
tain fundamentals or "root images" of which the social welfarist should not lose
sight. For instance, although the power of women has increased in America, both
previous generations and contemporary women occupied a power position relative to
men. In other words, the "root image" of women at any time must include power. At
a time when social welfare programs in the United States are becoming comparable to
those in other countries, when social welfare has become a multidisciplinary con-
cern (Diner, 1977:55-59), and when the federal government is continuing to increase
its funds for policy research on human resources (Horowitz and Katz, 1975), it is
inevitable that the welfarist will move toward more specialized knowledge, become
increasingly involved with bureaucratic programs, and be bombarded by a myriad of
increasing problems and obligations. While it is necessary for the responsibili-
ties, skills, and horizons of the welfarist to increase as his discipline grows,
there is danger that the fundamentals of human behavior will be slighted. Gyarfas
(1969), in fact, has expressed concern that social work is losing its commitment to
the individual's well-being and is becoming a managerial discipline. In view of the
fact that man's "root images" are only now becoming clear, any movement away from
them on the part of the welfarist would not only be sadly ironic, but it would be
counterproductive for the objectives of a helping profession. "Root images" seem
to characterize societies irrespective of time, place, and complexity. It is not
at all surprising that Diner (1977:59) found in his historical analysis of the So-
cial Service Review that "Perhaps the most striking feature of the history of the
Review is the extent to which so many past problems remain with us today." "Root
images" are intrinsic to symbolic interactionism.

Mechanisms for Disseminating
Basic Knowledge

As the social welfarist requires a basic understanding of the social psycholog-
ical make-up of the society and the "root images" that characterize human behavior,
there must be patterned ways in which this knowledge can be obtained. The aspiring
welfarist should be trained at the beginning of his career in the social sciences,
especially interactionism. Not only is this knowledge fundamental to the welfar-
ist's role, but it would serve as a "unifying link" between welfarists with differ-
ent tasks after they move into their respective positions. In this regard, Gilbert
and Specht (1974) believe that social welfare practitioners are hampered in their
work because of a lack of understanding of the over-riding welfare policies that
determine their approaches to meeting the needs of individuals. The fact that
women in the social work profession have to face sexism in their own field (see
Zietz and Erlich, 1976) also suggests that welfarists would profit from an early
exposure to an area that clearly delineates the subtleties of social interaction.

Interactionism developed within sociology. Welfarists must be trained in
interactionism and sociology. There are, of course, numerous other skills neces-
sary for the welfarist to master in light of the increasing complexity of his field

and his particular objectives. The morality and application aspects of the welfare role also necessitate exposure to areas such as philosophy and economics. We believe, however, that all of these requirements will "fall into place" more easily if the welfarist has a social psychological framework in which to categorize them.

Morality and the Social Welfarist

Social Welfare As An
Existential Institution

Coughlin put it supremely in the forward to McCormick's (1975:ix) book, "although values have to do with the ought of human conduct, they ultimately are existentially grounded." While academically oriented welfarists are keenly aware of this fact (see Howard, 1969; Warham, 1970:115-130), existential issues will continue to haunt the proponents of social welfare. The welfarist could deal with these issues by limiting them to "social needs that are related to the basic components of living and judged to be a matter of national and interactional concern" (see Pusic, 1972:116). Madison (1970:436), however, has shown that even in these basic areas the issue is, "What should be the boundaries of collective action for social welfare?" Should abortions, for instance, be financed by the federal government? In fact, as the welfarist moves from a residual to an institutional view of social welfare (see Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1965:138-140), morality issues may come to supercede those in the knowledge and implementation areas. This is one reason why the social welfarist must view social behavior from the symbolic interactional perspective, a perspective that underscores the constructed nature of reality. The social welfarist occupies an awkward position. Both a value commitment and a value neutrality characterize his role. The welfarist must then be committed to helping his fellows but yet remain circumspect regarding the parameters of this help in any given historical context.

Employing An Existential
Perspective

Interactionism has an existential quality because it recognizes that "reality has no intrinsic meaning." Without adopting a solipsistic position (Blumer, 1969: 22), interactionism stresses that the significant symbols or social objects of individuals, groups, communities, and societies primarily emerge, and are sustained and modified, through social interaction. This emphasis serves as a constant reminder to the social welfarist that the needs of the individuals and groups that he serves within a pluralistic society will not be the same, will often vary over time, and will be related to situational and historical contexts. Welfarists have long debated the merits of individualism versus collectivism. Without denouncing the latter, individuals do, however, inevitably come to relate to social objects in terms of their own unique experiences, and it is a mistake to assume that individuals in the same category of some demographic variable are identical, or even similar, in any given respect. We have shown, for example, that the same characteristics cannot be attributed to "women" just because they happened to have been assigned this common label by society.

The core morality issue for the social welfarist is the designation of helping objectives in the specific instance. What relevance does symbolic interactionism have in this regard? Interactionism or any other intellectual perspective does not contain an answer to this question! This is fundamentally a moral, not an intellectual issue. Interactionism does, however, direct attention to the fact that values or social object preferences do not exist in the abstract. They are anchored in the lives of individuals and in the ongoing interactions of groups. The social welfarist should (1) fully appreciate that values are an audience-based phenomenon, (2) use empirically based data to determine the audiences that influence, and will be influenced by proposed welfare changes, and (3) obtain as true a "reading" as possible of the views of these audiences. We have already pointed out that the latter can best be accomplished by going directly to the actor in an open-end manner. Hochschild (1973b), for instance, found that the women in one old folks home were quite content with their lives even though, to Hochschild, their situations initially appeared quite dismal.

The gathering of information regarding the audiences connected with proposed welfare changes is not the final step in the welfare decision-making process. The actors' perspectives have to be digested. Decisions still have to be made. These perspectives will often be discordant, inconsistent with other information or requirements, and, in some instances, reflect vested interests on the part of certain groups. The views of some minority women in regard to possible financial aid may indeed be suspect. The welfarist should also recognize that he too is an "interested and fallible audience" in these deliberations. Perhaps other audiences will need to be taken into consideration. Just as welfare decisions may reflect the role of the federal government and powerful groups within the community (see Magill and Clark, 1975), so too will such factors as the career pattern of the welfarist in the welfare institution (see Epstein, 1970) have an impact. As McCormick (1975: 84-90) has emphasized, integrity is an indispensable quality for those in professional roles. Such integrity is not easy to achieve or maintain.

Implementation and the Social Welfarist

Focus on Relative Deprivation and Communication of Rationales

The welfarist has assigned considerable attention to the audiences that are the targets of welfare. Should welfare be residual or institutional? Should welfare be limited to financial assistance or be extended to include the broader needs of, for example, women? While a helping profession must necessarily consider its target audiences, such concerns may have lessened interest in the nonrecipients of particular welfare benefits. When help is extended to an audience, that help will frequently have an influence on other audiences—irrespective of their welfare statuses. The welfarist should give more systematic attention to these nontarget audiences.

While there are many ways the nonrecipients of welfare benefits could be influenced by the benefits extended to others, interactionism has historically

focused on the symbolic linkage between the self and its audiences. There is much in these discussions of interest and importance to the welfarist. While some welfarists have emphasized the significance of relative deprivation (e.g., Weinberger, 1969), this is an aspect of the self-other linkage that merits much more attention. The welfarist should, for example, show more concern for the communication of the rationales behind his decisions to nonrecipient audiences. It has been indicated that resource deprivation is sometimes a result of misperception (Schmitt and Grupp, 1976). Clear, direct, and immediate communication might entirely negate this type of deprivation. The more effective communication of rationales would also help to reduce the stigma associated with welfare recipients, such as "welfare mothers." Communication, of course, is not a panacea. Many issues are complex and emotional, and, there are injustices. We feel, however, that the communication of rationales is always a necessary step. If the welfarist cannot defend his decisions, they should not have been made.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

"What does 'woman' stand for in twentieth century America?" This question reflects the motivation for, and the end of, our views. "Woman" has always been a symbol to Americans. However, as woman's role has changed the "meaning" of 'woman' has become increasingly complex and can no longer be taken for granted. The danger remains great. Even feminists have fallen victim to it.

> Stated differently, this multiplicity of uniqueness in persons
> and their roles constitutes what elsewhere has been called the
> principle of multiple realities, those combinations consti-
> tuting different orders of beingness or "reality" for the in-
> dividuals to whom they accrue and for others with whom that
> individual is in interaction. These realities, however, are
> obscured by generalizations, such as the assumption of equal-
> ity in feminist thought (Nelson and Olesen, 1977:20-21, our
> italics).

Symbolic interactionism enhances the symbolic aspects of "woman" and is capable of providing the social welfarist, and others, with a knowledge view that validly depicts social interaction, of underscoring the existential nature of social welfare, and of facilitating implementation within the welfare field. The welfarist is encouraged to pursue these capabilities.

Notes

[1]Those pursuing the study of "woman" within a symbolic context must, of course, give additional attention to the nature of symbols. We have found the leads of Warner (1959) particularly helpful in this regard. Warner defines symbols as

consisting of both signs and meanings. Also, see Vernon (1972).

[2]SI has, of course, been subjected to criticism. Some of the more sophisti-
cated critiques include Denzin (1969:929), Huber (1973b), and Zeitlin (1973).

[3]For a more detailed discussion of these three realities, see (Schmitt and
Grupp, unpublished).

[4]For a consideration of such aspects of the SOP as its history, format, admin-
istration, coding strategies, coding reliability, assets, validity, and empirical
applications, see (Schmitt and Grupp, unpublished).

[5]Some may agree with our theoretical defense of the SOP but contend that data
should only be gathered in natural situations (see Douglas, 1970:12). We encourage
the study of human interaction by participant observation but in all cases the in-
dividual's symbolic world should be tapped.

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