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Feminist Analysis of Public Policy

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Feminist Analyses of Public Policy

Martha A. Ackelsberg

Lourdes Benería and Catharine Stimpson, eds., *Women, Households and the Economy*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1987.

Ellen Boneparth and Emily Stoper, eds., *Women, Power and Policy: Toward the Year 2000*, 2nd ed., New York, Pergamon, 1988.

Joyce Gelb, *Feminism and Politics: A Comparative Perspective*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989.

Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley, *Women and Public Policies*, rev. ed., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987.

Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence*, New York, Viking, 1988.

Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.

Ann Showstack Sassoon, ed., *Women and the State: The Shifting Boundaries of Public and Private*, London, Hutchinson, 1987.

Dorothy McBride Stetson, *Women's Rights in the USA: Policy Debates and Gender Roles*, Pacific Grove, Brooks/Cole, 1991.

Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin, eds., *Women, Politics and Change*, New York, Russell Sage, 1990.

The past ten years have witnessed a virtual explosion of writings on women and politics in general, and women and public policy in particular. Many studies have examined the gender dimensions of public policy outcomes, exploring how policies have affected men and women differently. Others have focused on the policymaking process, examining who gets involved, over what issues, with what methods and what degree of success. And more

recently others have looked at the process of policy implementation, asking whether and how female bureaucrats attempt to wield the power available to them. For example, do they do so in the same ways as males? Do they express different values? What are their rates of success? These questions, of course, bring this scholarship squarely into the center of a number of current feminist theoretical debates, including such questions as: Is there a "women's way" of engaging in politics? Is there a "women's interest"? Finally, taking off from a broad range of writings not only about public policy, but also about activism and the state, increasing numbers of feminists writing about public policy are advocating examination of the tensions and/or interactions between efforts by the state to exert social control and efforts by subordinated groups to resist them.

Such perspectives, which encourage us to look not only at the question of whether public policies meet needs and/or provide services, but also at the empowerment (or disempowerment) effects of policy initiatives, have been brought to the fore in recent discussions of the origins and development of the welfare state both in the United States and in Europe. Feminist theorists have examined the welfare state, not just as it has affected women, but also as women were involved in creating it. The exploration of women in the welfare state again raises questions about modes of influencing or creating policy. Who gains and who loses from defining problems and solutions in particular ways? How do the relatively powerless manipulate the resources available to them? How are existing inequalities challenged or reinforced?

This essay provides an overview of some of this recent literature and an attempt to outline the research questions it poses. The essay is divided into four related parts, each attempting to explore one of the following sets of concerns. First, what routes have women taken to gain access to political power, and how do these routes affect policy outcomes? Gelb and Palley's *Women and Public Policies*, for example, has as its focus the attempt to understand "what behavior patterns . . . are most likely to facilitate success for emergent groups trying to positively effect changes in the status quo" (p. 7). Similarly, Boneparth and Stoper characterize the authors of their volume, *Women, Power and Policy*, as concerned to understand "why some efforts at influencing policy are more effective than others" (p. 2). Similar questions animate Gelb's *Feminism and Politics*, Stetson's *Women's Rights in the USA*, and a number of essays in Sassoon's *Women and the State*.

Second, how have gender expectations affected the identification of policy problems and public policies to address them? These questions provide an important focus of Linda Gordon's *Heroes of Their Own Lives*, as well as of her edited volume, *Women, the State and Welfare*, and are central to the issues explored in *Women, Politics and Change*, *Women and the State*, and *Women, Households and the Economy*. Further, they raise considerations of the place of sameness and difference (as between men and women and among women) both in developing and in evaluating public policy.

The third section offers a more in-depth look at a range of materials on women and the welfare state, focused primarily, though not exclusively, on the U.S. Of course, the very definition of a "welfare state" varies considerably, especially as between the U.S. and Europe—an issue that has not escaped the attention of many of these authors. Yet in the context of these differences the authors also point to and examine the special relation of women to the welfare state in creating it, as its clients, and as its employees; the question of a shift from "private" to "public" dependence; and the issue of whether the state is best understood as a site of control or as a locus of mobilization.

Finally, I explore some of the broader implications of these works for understandings of the nature of women's citizenship. What role does women's activism at the community level have in affecting public policy or in contributing to our understandings of citizenship? What are the consequences of looking at women as both clients and employees of the state? Finally, we return to the question of "women's politics." Are there unique aspects to women's activism? What is the place of the family as an institution in structuring women's relationship to political life? What are the implications of this relationship for reconceptualizing the obligations and benefits of citizenship?

Politics as Influence

As I suggested above, one central focus of feminist policy analysts is on routes to political power and the success of feminists in influencing policymaking and implementation. With respect to the U.S., in particular, both Gelb and Palley and Boneparth and Stoper, in their introductory essay, seem to take as their starting point the transformation of the women's movement in the U.S. from a decentralized, antihierarchical social movement to a more leadership-based set of professionalized lobbying organizations. And, in *Feminism and Politics*, Gelb compares the U.S., British, and Swedish contexts and develops in greater depth a discussion of the consequences of the nature and structure of these movements.

One fascinating point that becomes clear from these analyses, but which is not especially noted in any of them, is the distinction between the politics of getting issues onto the agenda and the politics of influence, policymaking, and implementation. As Boneparth and Stoper argue in their introduction, in the late 1960s the U.S. women's movement changed the agenda of U.S. politics by politicizing what had previously been viewed as personal issues—for example, sex-stereotyping, pregnancy, contraception, child-care, displaced homemakers, sexual harassment, rape, pornography, and domestic violence" (p. 1). Further, the movement made these matters not only for public discussion, but also for governmental attention.

By the 1970s the movement was confronted with a new challenge: how to convert public attention to these concerns into public policy, that is, laws, judicial decisions, and administrative changes. How was this done? It was accomplished by the creation of a variety of interest groups, which were able both to lobby for change and to monitor the implementation of new policies. The creation and functioning of these groups is the explicit focus of Gelb and Palley, much of Gelb's comparative study, and of many of the essays in Boneparth and Stoper.

The critical point, here, is that it took a broad-based movement (and the changed national political climate resulting from the civil rights and the antiwar movements, in particular) to get issues articulated and heard. But what did it take to get the issues addressed through public policy, and, further, to make sure that the policies were successfully implemented?

On this point, Gelb and Palley are perhaps the most explicit. The U.S. is, they argue, essentially an interest-group-based, pluralist democracy. And, in the U.S., those groups that are able to play by pluralist rules will be most successful. This factor explains both the successes and the limits of the strategies followed by the major women's organizations (for example, NOW, NARAL, WEAL, NWPC). In particular, Gelb and Palley offer four rules

of success for groups wishing to exercise influence in the U.S. political system. The group must be perceived as legitimate. To be perceived as legitimate, it should focus on incremental issues (in particular, on what they refer to as “role equity” issues rather than on “role change”). It must stress its role as the provision of information to policymakers and the mobilization of allies, define success in terms of “increments,” and avoid confrontation. It must engage in struggle over the definition of the situation through manipulation of symbols (pp. 7–8). The strategies that work, in other words, are essentially reformist and incrementalist. This point of view—which Stetson seems to share in her historically oriented overview, *Women’s Rights in the USA*—is also implicit in the works of many of the authors in the Boneparth and Stoper volume.

Their claim here—in opposition to critics who argue that the pluralist framework of U.S. politics makes significant change difficult, if not impossible—is that it is possible to achieve meaningful change “in the guise of incrementalism if the importance of a seemingly narrow issue is not recognized by key political actors.”¹ In other words, the key to success in the American political context is to think small. Whereas Schattschneider, Lipsky, and Piven and Cloward, for example, have argued that disruptive protest that socializes the conflict—thereby bringing in as many new actors as possible—is the only real hope for “out” groups to influence policy,² Gelb and Palley and Stetson argue that, in the case of women’s issues, the opposite is the case. Creating conflict, they claim, is harmful to the goals of change and generates a backlash of pressure in favor of the status quo. The most effective strategy is to define issues as narrowly as possible, in terms of role equity rather than role change (note the success of women’s activism in the areas of equal credit, educational equity, pregnancy discrimination, and some aspects of economic equity), the implication being, in effect, that such changes can “slip by” without policymakers realizing how significant they really are. In short, “the group that succeeds in defining and delimiting the parameters of debate may have a headstart in victory.”³

There are, of course, other factors important to the success of the “incrementalist” strategy. Among these are pressure from more radical women’s organizations outside the policy process, the existence of a “women’s policy network,” and women’s roles in Congress. Women’s organizations outside the formal policy arena—especially groups labeled “radical”—can allow those inside to appear moderate and thus play an important role in legitimizing their activities.⁴ Women’s pressure groups and organizations also find important support from a women’s “policy network [that] . . . includes representatives from the legislative and administrative sectors of government and the media, as well as legal and professional women in the nation’s capital.”⁵ Women who are not themselves formal policymakers but are rather implementers can have crucial roles in this process. As Vivien Hart and Catherine East argue, bureaucrats may have considerable leeway to influence policy at the implementation stage.⁶ Finally, the inroads women have made in Congress and other formal political institutions are also crucial. Gelb and Palley and Stetson point to the role of the Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues in raising and legitimizing feminist role equity issues, the success of women representatives in gaining placement on key congressional committees, the role of congressional aides and administrators, especially in monitoring the implementation of policies and alerting women’s organizations when problems develop, and the willingness to compromise that women have learned from participating in Congress and other mainstream political institutions.

Altogether, then, Gelb, Palley, and Stetson argue that women's willingness (and increasing ability) to play by the rules of the game has resulted in success. Nevertheless, there is another side to these successes: the danger of "domestication." As Anne Costain reported of her interviews with female public policy activists, "most of the group representatives interviewed . . . were somewhat uncomfortable talking about feminist issues. They preferred the term women's issues. . . . Priority issues were those that did not cost much and drew bipartisan support."⁷

In fact, even Gelb and Palley seem to admit that pluralist incrementalism works only so far. On those issues that are difficult (or impossible) to construe as issues of role equity—for example, abortion, comparable worth, and unisex insurance—there has been little success. They readily acknowledge that these remaining issues, especially the economic ones, have at their crux a challenge to the continuing identification of women with home and domestic responsibilities, and that the challenge seems to make the incrementalist approach inappropriate and/or irrelevant. Their tips on "thinking small" do not seem to give many clues (or, in fact, to offer much hope) for policy change in those areas. The claim that women can win as long as they keep their sights low does not provide much help for policy initiatives which necessarily have "higher" aims. As Kathleen Staudt and Jane Jaquette suggest in the Boneparth and Stoper volume:

By staying within the bounds of conventional two-party politics, the women's movement did succeed in winning a number of real victories. But this approach made it utterly impossible to articulate and promote an alternative value system [that is, a "women-centered" approach, rather than arguments on the basis of "special treatment for women"]; it may be that women's status cannot really change without such a transformation of values.⁸

In short, truly redistributive goals may be as difficult to achieve in this context as they are in the U.S. system more generally.

Another way in which many of these studies explore the strengths and weaknesses of incrementalism is through comparing U.S. public welfare policies with the policy achievements of "welfare states" in the U.K., Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Such a comparison, Gelb suggests, can point out how what she terms "political opportunity structures" affect the kinds of policies implemented, and with what consequences.

For example, as I have noted already, and as is emphasized in Gelb and Palley, Gelb, Boneparth and Stoper, and Stetson, the 1960s and 1970s saw the development of a decentralized, locally based, and antihierarchical "women's liberation movement" in both the U.S. and the U.K. In the U.S. over the last two decades, many women's organizations became professionalized interest groups, focused on lobbying. They are pragmatic and oriented toward building coalitions with other organizations (both within and outside the larger "women's movement") to influence central policymakers. In short, U.S. feminists have been quite successful in creating autonomous women's groups that aim at exercising influence over formal political institutions.

In the U.K., on the other hand, the liberal feminist wing of the earlier "women's liberation movement" attempted to become involved in policy debates, not through the creation of independent women's lobbying organizations, but through participation in mainstream party and union structures. These strategies, however, were largely

unsuccessful. As a result, most of the women's movement remains decentralist and "purist," refusing to engage with policymaking institutions. Nor have British movement organizations (or movement women) been very successful in monitoring the policymaking (or implementation) process. In each of these realms, women have been much more successful in the U.S.

But what of Sweden? Sweden, with its extensive parental leave policies, family allowances, and national attention to child care, is often viewed (particularly by feminists and progressives in the U.S.) as a feminist or social welfare "heaven." But there is a serious problem here. Specifically, Sweden's policies have not been developed to address women's needs as women have defined them, but rather they have been implemented "from above" as programs to facilitate women's mobilization into the paid labor force. Gelb asserts that "the framing of discussion about women in the guise of 'equality' or 'family policy' often results in failure to discuss women's issues in sexual power terms . . . women are often powerless 'policytakers' instead of policymakers."⁹ Or, as Helga Hernes puts it even more strongly in the Sassoon volume: "In the political process, women are *recipients*, men are *participants*. . . . Women[']s . . . client and employee status is defined by a corporate political system in which they do not participate on a level of citizenship equal to that of men as a group."¹⁰ Sweden has achieved what in the U.S. are perceived as feminist goals, but without a feminist movement and without empowering women. How is this so? In part, no doubt, because there the terms of the debate have been structured around class, rather than gender. Policies may have benefitted women, but they have benefitted them, as it were, as workers rather than "as women."

Does this difference matter? Or, to put it another way, what constitutes "success"? Women in the U.S. may have made fewer gains in general welfare, but they seem much better off in terms of political influence. Gelb suggests that in the end access to political influence matters: "legislation is not enough, as it is necessary to have continued access to the implementation process in order to consolidate policy gains and achieve further political success."¹¹ This position seems to be shared not only by those clearly in the "incrementalist school" (Gelb, Palley, and Stetson, among those under review here), but also by a number of other authors who otherwise take a more critical policy stance. I return to this issue in greater depth below.

Gender Expectations and the Identification of Policy Problems

The questions of what constitutes "success" brings us to the larger exploration of the impact of gender expectations on the identification of problems and on policies to address them. In some ways, this is the newest area of feminist public policy studies, though it is one that seems to have enormous potential payoffs.

Most basically, such a focus entails awareness of a point central to Linda Gordon's *Heroes of Their Own Lives*: that what we "see" as a social problem and what we take that problem to be is, itself, a social construct that changes over time. Further, the definition itself may be gendered. Thus, for example, "the modern history of family violence is not the story of changing responses to a constant problem, but, in large part, of redefinition of the problem itself." Such definitions (and redefinitions) of policy, particularly in the area of

social welfare affecting women and children, are dependent on the larger social context and, in particular, on the strength and articulateness of the feminist movement. "Born as a social problem in an era of a powerful women's rights movement, the 1870s, campaigns against child abuse and wife-beating have tended to lose momentum and support, even to disappear altogether, when feminist influence is in decline." For example, Gordon tells us, the 1940s and 1950s (a relative "low point" for feminist consciousness and feminist organizing) saw the development of a new category of child neglect, "emotional neglect." "Child-neglect cases [were] seen as products not of poverty but of neurotic rejection or negligence. . . . Emotional neglect is a gendered form of child abuse—only mothers could be guilty of it." During this era, the prime focus of "child protectors" was not on actual sexual or physical molestation of children (which was as common during these years as it was before and after), but rather on this new category of "emotional neglect." Conversely, it is not surprising that wife-battering, incest, and child abuse are receiving much more attention now, in the context of the current wave of the feminist movement which has empowered women to speak, be heard, and resist.¹²

Looking at the ways gender expectations define problems affects not only the study of policies specifically directed at women, but also the ways we look for, or are blind to, the gender dimensions of a wide range of public policies. For example, essays in *Women, Households and the Economy* explore the impact of deindustrialization and the economic restructuring of the U.S. economy on gender relations. Sara Kuhn and Barry Bluestone, Heidi Hartman, and Maxine Baca Zinn each in different ways asks what the loss of manufacturing jobs and the shift to a service economy mean for gender relations. Kuhn and Bluestone and Zinn suggest that these shifts have gender (and race) specific consequences and contribute importantly to the impoverishment of single women (especially single minority women) with children. Hartman, on the other hand, sees them as contributing to an equalization of job opportunities—or, more frequently, lack of opportunities—between women and men and consequently as potentially empowering women with respect to men.

To take another example, Margot Kempers and Paula Rayman in the same volume examine the effects of policies to combat unemployment which assume that "the unemployed worker" is male. These have resulted in an OEO (and subsequent unemployment programs) that provided training for jobs that were largely open only to men. Further, these programs effectively ignored the costs of unemployment for women, who generally become more active as men become less active, when their families try to cope with unemployment. The costs of unemployment for women are often greater than those for men, since the replacement jobs women can get tend to offer lower wages than men's and leave women less able to support their families than they (or their husbands) were before.¹³

Alternatively, what have been the gender (and race) consequences of FHA and VA loans? These policies, enacted and implemented in the post-World War II era, provided the mortgage guarantees that—along with federal subsidies for highway construction—fueled suburbanization. But the benefits of suburbanization were, until very recently, effectively limited to white, male-headed families. Furthermore, these policies contributed to the isolation of (white) women in the suburbs¹⁴ and, more significantly, to the economic and social gap between families headed by white men and those headed by minority men or women or white women, none of whom could get government-backed mortgages because of

prevailing expectations with respect to race (they were perceived as not “good credit risks”) or gender (they were viewed as unreliable or inconsistent workers).¹⁵

These are just a few examples of the ways taking gender seriously can affect a whole range of policy questions that we might not necessarily perceive as gender-related. They raise, too, another set of questions that have been—and remain—the focus of much debate within the feminist movement and the feminist theoretical community: those that fall under the rubric of “sameness versus difference.”

Put most simply, women’s reproductive capacity—and the expectation that women will raise children and care for them, their husbands, their home, and elderly dependents, regardless of what else they do in the way of paid or volunteer labor—has been used to construct women as a “special” category of workers in the paid labor force. Most directly, women can become pregnant; men can not. Women can and do give birth; men do not and can not. Women’s reproductive capacities may be affected by toxins in the workplace in different (or at least more obvious ways) than men’s.

The question for public policy, of course, is how we respond to such differences on a policy level. Historically, one response has been “protective” legislation, which defines women as in need of special treatment or protection. However, as numerous critics of protective legislation have noted, such special treatment can also serve as a barrier to women’s advancement in largely male-dominated occupations.¹⁶ Accordingly, as Stetson suggests, in the post-World War II period the emphasis of most policy affecting women workers “was transformed from protection to equality.”¹⁷ Her book explores both the history of the “protection” approach (beginning with Muller vs. Oregon) and more recent strategies for “equality,” including affirmative action, the Equal Pay Act, and comparable worth legislation. Pregnancy and maternity issues are treated in a separate chapter on “work and family.”

Other feminist critics argue for a more “woman-centered approach” which treats women’s biology as normal rather than as an exception to a male-defined norm. Thus, for example, Louise A. Williams questions whether workplace safety standards should be set to protect those defined as a “hypersusceptible” work force (that is, women) or whether all workers ought to come under the “protective” aegis of law. “Reproductive health,” she argues, “is not just a woman’s issue.”¹⁸ Similarly Patricia Huckle asks: “what are some of the consequences assumed to follow from women’s capacity to reproduce, as reflected in public law and policy?” The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, which represented a victory for the women’s lobby, nevertheless left major issues of equality versus difference, and the larger issues rooted in women’s roles as homemaker and child-rearer, fundamentally unresolved.¹⁹ These questions, and efforts at reformulation, are generating new ways of thinking about issues that are very much at the center of contemporary feminist debates about “difference.”²⁰

Gender and the Welfare State

One arena in which extensive work has been done on gender and public policy is surely the welfare state. However, as Linda Gordon points out in her superb introductory essay to *Women, the State, and Welfare*, even that work is of relatively recent vintage. Studies have

explored the role of women in the creation of welfare states, gender differences in the impact and functions of welfare states, and women's special relationship to them.

Gender and the Origins of the Welfare State Much theoretical and historical work on the state—particularly that undertaken in the traditions influenced by Marxism and the works of Michel Foucault—focused on the development of the welfare state as a response to the mobilization of new groups. In this view, unions and workers' parties mobilized the working class, and welfare state provisions were introduced in an effort to incorporate them into the political process and reduce pressure on capitalism and the liberal democratic state.²¹ Thus, these critics argue, welfare states are best understood as mechanisms for social control. Others suggest that welfare states took over burdens that had traditionally been the responsibility of individual families but that, with the advent of capitalism and urbanization, could no longer be effectively performed by them—for example, social services, medical care, and old-age insurance. Since, according to this view, women did not constitute a substantial proportion of the membership of most labor unions (pressure from which forced the adoption of such policies) and were not incorporated in large numbers into the newly emerging worker-oriented political parties, it is not surprising that women were effectively excluded from the planning of welfare state policies. Thus, women were clearly affected, but mostly as objects of policies rather than as participants in the shaping or implementation of them.²²

But recent historiography questions both of these views, and much of the questioning is reflected in the volumes under consideration here.

Although lacking the vote and formal political power in both the U.S. and western Europe, women were nevertheless critical actors in changing perceptions of the issues and the terms of debate, as well as creating model programs at the local level which were later adopted by state and federal governments. The impetus and political support for such programs as mothers' pensions came from women's organizations, and many of the programs and policies were taken over almost in full by later state and federal programs.²³ Consequently, one major and growing focus of recent feminist public policy work has been the exploration of the role of women and women's organizations in contributing to the construction of the welfare state. On this topic, the Gordon volume is a particularly welcome addition. Gordon's introductory essay offers a broad survey of the field, and essays by Virginia Sapiro, Paula Baker, Gwendolyn Mink, Barbara J. Nelson, and Gordon herself examine in depth the roles of women's organizations in the establishment of particular policies, as well as the gender- and race-based limits of many of those policies. In addition, there are valuable essays by Suzanne Lebsack, Nancy Cott, Barbara Nelson, and Elizabeth Faue in the book edited by Tilly and Gurin.

Nevertheless, there were important limits to the achievements of these women's groups. First, they argued for programs on the basis of women's special or unique characteristics—for example, nurturing, caring, attentiveness to home and children, pacifism—which effectively locked women into these roles and assumed that most women would be dependent on men for their primary sources of support. The programs they created (for example, AFDC) were not then and still are not designed to enable women to survive on their own.²⁴

Second, Barbara Nelson and Gwendolyn Mink argue that these programs had a distinctly racial component. Social welfare programs in the U.S., in particular, were two-tiered. First tier programs (including Social Security, unemployment insurance, and more recently Medicare) were not means-tested, offered relatively high benefits, and were linked to one's relationship to the labor market (although, significantly, the Social Security Act specifically excluded agricultural and domestic laborers from both unemployment and old-age coverage, while 60–90 percent of all black workers were employed in these two sectors!). Second tier programs (primarily AFDC, general relief, and more recently Medicaid) were directed toward those viewed as "dependent." These programs were means-tested and offered much lower benefit levels.

What accounts for the creation of this structure? Once again, we see the effects of gender- and race-based role expectations. The pervasive assumption that women ought to be supported by men and that their primary role was caretaker of the home justified welfare programs which effectively guaranteed women's dependence. The only explanation for the exclusion of the overwhelming majority of black workers from coverage was racism. Mink argues that, as opposed to the European welfare state which was designed to mitigate the effects of market inequality, the U.S. welfare state was designed to mitigate the effects of racial diversity and that, further, this effort required the targeting of women in an attempt to create "citizen-mothers" who would maintain "racial order" and "vigor in the citizenry" rather than "workers." In short, a combination of gender and race structured the U.S. welfare state.²⁵

Furthermore, these critics bring to the forefront that middle class women reformers, who were excluded from formal participation in the political arena but managed nevertheless to exert significant influence, took part in the creation of this system—not just of the constituent parts, but of the two-tiered system as a whole. That is, while they attempted to address the needs of their "less fortunate sisters," they failed to challenge—indeed, they helped to reproduce—an overall social structure that was sharply divided by race and class. The full picture of the gender dimensions of the creation of the welfare state is, then, much more complex than earlier work might have led us to believe. And, as is clear both in *Heroes of Their Own Lives* and in Gordon's edited volume, it is surely not a picture in which (middle class white) women (reformers) emerge as unblemished heroines.

Gender and the Functions of the Welfare State Virtually all (feminist) public policy analysts recognize that, in their social roles as caretakers and nurturers, women have a particular relationship to the welfare state. In the U.S., these roles make women especially visible as clients and employees of the state; in Sweden, as employees. What do these roles mean? And what differences do we find between the U.S. and the Swedish contexts?

The essays in Sassoon's edited volume, *Women and the State*, explore gender in the European welfare state with creativity and depth. Many critics, for example, have noted that welfare state programs depend for their success on what Laura Balbo (in this volume) has termed women's "servicing role." The welfare state, while it offers a variety of services, does not provide them as parts of a seamless whole; it takes concentrated work and effort to determine what services are available and which of them one's family is eligible for and time to fill out the forms or stand on the lines necessary to receive them.²⁶ The programs, like

women's lives, are, Balbo argues, a "crazy quilt" whose pieces (whether they be subsidized wages, support services, housing allowances, food stamps, or cash supplements) women have to piece together. It is, in short, virtually a full-time job to manage welfare-state benefits, and women's (unseen and unpaid) work enables these benefits to go much farther than they otherwise would. Further, "not only does women's work fill the gaps in available resources within an unequal and fragmented society, the ideology that women are by nature destined to provide servicing is daily reinforced by their concrete experience" (p. 67). Interestingly, Michael Walzer has referred to women "as the reserve army of the welfare system." He adds that "it would be better, surely, to have a gender-free reserve," but the absence of a gender analysis in his own work makes it difficult for him to acknowledge the links between women's existing roles (and subordination) and the functioning of the system as a whole.²⁷

The question of women's servicing role in sustaining or supplementing welfare state benefits represents one aspect of a debate about dependency and the welfare state. The broad terms of this debate should be all too familiar to students of U.S. politics, where right-wing critics of the welfare system have long argued that it simply causes and reinforces "dependency" among recipients. Feminist critics, however, focus on the question of whether the welfare system reinforces women's dependence, in particular. Helga Hernes, for example, suggests that the Scandinavian welfare state, specifically, replaces women's private dependence on fathers and husbands in families with public dependence on the new welfare state (in Sassoon, esp. pp. 76–86). In her view, whether we see women related to the welfare state primarily as clients or as employees (and both relationships are present, both in the U.S. and in Sweden), women are effectively denied independence. As employees, they are less unionized, more dependent on their employer (the state), and less protected by unions than are men. As clients or citizens, they have little or no representation in corporatively structured decision-making bodies and once again find themselves largely in a dependent position (p. 81). Overall then:

Women have become clients and employees of a highly developed welfare state with a large public service sector. Their client and employee status is defined by a corporate political system in which they do not participate on a level of citizenship equal to that of men as a group. . . . Women's lives are more dependent and determined by state policies than are men's.²⁸

Hernes' argument states a position increasingly presented by one major school of feminist critics, who focus on the welfare state as a system of social control. These critics contend that the state—and, in particular, the modern welfare state—is not and can not be a locus of empowerment for women. If women are to experience themselves as independent, autonomous political actors and to act on that perception, they must attempt at least to operate apart from prevailing structures of power.²⁹

Anette Borchorst and Birte Siim (also in Sassoon) offer another, somewhat more sanguine view of the Scandinavian welfare state. Focusing on the existence of a large state sector in Denmark which employs considerable numbers of women and offers a wide variety of services to citizens of both sexes, they seem to turn the argument around. In their view, "a strong public service sector seems to be one precondition for [women's] *avoiding* becoming solely dependent on the state as *clients*."³⁰ Yet, along with Hernes, Borchorst and Siim

acknowledge that women's economic position is far superior in the Scandinavian countries to what it is in the U.S. and that women's political power position is worse. The question remains, then, which matters more? On what is dependence or independence based? Borchorst and Siim argue that it is not enough for women to have the economic means to support themselves and their children, a goal they have achieved Scandinavian countries but not in the U.S. or U.K.

It is necessary that women participate in the determination of what their social needs and political interests actually are. Women must develop more concrete strategies towards the state, which include policies to strengthen women's position and give women more power as mothers, workers and citizens within the framework of a more democratic welfare state. (p. 154)

In short, once again, what matters is political empowerment, meaningful participation in the creation and implementation of public policy.

Finally, another group of critics sees women's relationship to the welfare state in yet a different light, as a site of contestation which provides the context for mobilization. Piven and Cloward's *Regulating the Poor, Poor People's Movements*, and *The New Class War* provide important bases for such arguments, although, as Linda Gordon has recently noted, these works are surprisingly devoid of gender analysis and ignore or understate what she sees as an autonomous agenda of the state in regulating family structure, sexuality, and domestic labor.³¹ Increasingly, feminist historians and social scientists are exploring the ways the welfare state functions, not just as a site of control, but as a locus of resistance. Helga Hernes has suggested that, whereas for men welfare state programs seem to have arisen in response to political mobilization, for women mobilization may be a response to the politicization of new policy arenas such as child care and family leave by the welfare state itself.³² Gordon's *Heroes of Their Own Lives* makes clear that the process of politicization, mobilization, control, and resistance is a fluid one, dependent largely on the broader political context (and in particular on the strength of the feminist movement). But in any case, no program can be seen simply as a site of control; under given circumstances, working-class women have managed to turn even seemingly repressive programs and policies into sources of support and even empowerment. Similarly, essays by Gordon, Paula Baker, and Jane Jensen in the Gordon volume and by Tilly and Gurin, Suzanne Lebsock, Nancy Cott, Kristi Andersen, and Elizabeth Faue in the Tilly and Gurin volume all point to the ways women have struggled, both historically and in the contemporary period, to use whatever (limited) resources they have available to increase their power and autonomy, vis-à-vis men in their families, social welfare institutions, and the state.³³ The questions they raise for us and for future work are critical ones. How do sites of control become sites of contestation? How can resistance be supported and/or encouraged?

Public Policy and Women's Citizenship

Finally, these questions about empowerment and dependency in relation to the welfare state lead to broader concerns about women's citizenship. One important arena of research has been on differences of class and race among women. Several years ago, Barbara Nelson

explored the relationship of poor women to the state, suggesting that, at least in the context of the U.S., the role of “client” may be incompatible with that of citizen.³⁴ Similarly, a number of the articles in Benería and Stimpson’s *Women and Structural Transformation* and in Linda Gordon’s *Women, the State and Welfare* trace the differing implications by race and gender of the shift from manufacturing to a service economy and the connection of this shift to the impoverishment of women, especially minority women household heads.³⁵

As I have also suggested, they lead us further to explore public policy as both a product of women’s activism and as a potential mobilizer of women. Increasing numbers of feminist scholars have suggested, for example, that, as Tilly and Gurin put it in their introductory essay, “collective action . . . grew out of the quotidian” (p. 8). Such a perspective forces us to confront not only the ways women’s activism has changed with time, but also the ways women have helped to define the boundaries and practices of politics and public policy in the U.S. Many of the articles in Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen’s *Women and the Politics of Empowerment*, for example, while not focusing explicitly on public policy per se, nevertheless insist that women’s activism in the supposedly “nonpolitical” contexts of workplace and community must be taken into account if we are to have a full picture of politics in the U.S.³⁶

In their introductory essay, Tilly and Gurin frame this phenomenon as one of “fluid boundaries between protopolitics and politics,” a pattern set in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the U.S., before women had the right to vote. Voluntarism and domesticity were two primary features of women’s lives during this period, but they did not exclude women from political life. Thus, for example, Paula Baker argues that, while women may have been formally limited by the cult of domesticity, far from being simply “domestic,” they used the home as a basis for political action.³⁷ The fact that political parties began at a time when women were excluded from electoral politics at both the federal and (most) state levels meant that parties were viewed essentially as male fraternal organizations (Baker, p. 60). The creation of mass political parties represented the beginnings of an important separation between men’s and women’s politics. The latter took a more interest group form and often focused on lobbying and other pressure group tactics to bring the state in to support and/or protect women.³⁸ Suzanne Lebsock, drawing on this work, develops a perspective first articulated by Baker that women’s voluntarism became an important reflection of women’s “difference” in the political arena. Such organizations as the WCTU, the YWCA, white ethnic and black women’s club movements, the social settlements, and the trade union movement were all effective, broad-based forms of women’s activism, with explicitly political goals, many of which grew out of women’s so-called “domestic sphere.” As Lebsock suggests, “feminists seem to have found partisan politics frustrating and fundamentally unresponsive to the desires of voteless women. ‘Parties,’ as Frances Willard once said, ‘are of no more value than so many tin cans.’ ”³⁹

The implications of this perspective are potentially far-reaching. We have already seen that many of the social welfare programs introduced during the Progressive Era were the products of women’s activism. What the studies of Baker and Lebsock, among others, suggest is that the structures of pluralist politics that have come to be considered so uniquely American a phenomenon may as well have been female creations. How is this so? In the presuffrage period, “women’s politics” was voluntarist, associational, and interest-group-oriented. With suffrage, women could start behaving politically “like men,” that is, they

could join and participate in political parties. But it was at this same time that American politics more generally came to focus more on interest groups and less on parties. As Lebock summarizes Baker's findings, "women's politics became more like men's even as men's politics became more like women's."⁴⁰ The implication here is that the pattern of interest-group-based politics, which became increasingly dominant in the post-Progressive period, was, at least in part, a creation of early twentieth-century female activism. The contributions of Nancy Hewitt and Nancy Cott in the Tilly and Gurin volume provide further support for these claims.

Finally, feminist critics are raising questions about gender expectations and definitions of citizenship, particularly the role of the family as an institution mediating women's relationship to the state. What does it mean for women's politics and public policy related to women that women have been and continue to be defined politically by their familial roles—that is, that, in Carole Pateman's formulation, for example, women are incorporated into the state not as citizens but as members of families?⁴¹ On the one hand, as we have seen, feminist policy analysts are attempting both to open up definitions of the family and to challenge women's identification with the family in reviewing many public policy arenas, from reproductive control to divorce to protective legislation (for example, Stoper, Williams, and Huckle in Boneparth and Stoper; Nelson, Faue, Freeman, Jacob, Brill and Klatch in Tilly and Gurin).⁴² On the other hand, Carole Pateman and others return us, in new guise, to the questions Nelson raised about gender, poverty, and citizenship. As Pateman has argued, citizenship in western liberal democracies has come to be identified with—or, more accurately to be viewed as a reward for—economic independence, a status effectively limited to men. Women have been incorporated primarily as dependents, either of men or of the state. Now, welfare state programs and changing family structures may offer the opportunity for women to become politically autonomous, self-directed beings. But does this mean that women can be fully incorporated into the state only if they, too, participate in what is essentially the "myth" of independence in liberal capitalism?⁴³

Our liberal political heritage seems to provide us with few ways of talking about relationships other than as ones of "independence" (which tends to be idealized as the relationship of men to the state) or "dependence" (which tends to be idealized as the relationships of women within the family). But all members of a political community, males and females, are mutually interdependent. Such mutual interdependence is, of course, a *sine qua non* of almost all social/political activism or movements for social change. Is it not possible to transfer these perceptions into the realm of "everyday politics," to imagine or begin to conceptualize ways of connecting women and men to one another and to the larger political community which neither lock them into stereotypical gender roles, rooted in a male-headed, male-dominated definition of family, nor force them to act as isolated, alienated monads? Can we allow people to be autonomous and self-directed and also not isolated from one another?

These are particularly difficult questions to ask, let alone to answer, in the highly individualistic U.S. political context. But the question of new ways of conceptualizing citizenship represents an extremely important theme running through much of the recent literature on women and public policy. In fact, the Gordon and the Tilly and Gurin volumes, in particular—in providing essays that focus on women's activism both outside "normal" political channels and increasingly within them—offer important resources for this task. As

feminist social historians and social theorists recover the history of women's activism, they have noted the ways that activism crosses boundaries of so-called public and private spheres, makes "political" that which had been defined as "personal," and vice versa. What has been less obviously noticed, however, is that such activism also challenges notions of dependence and independence.⁴⁴ Activists (whether men or women) rarely see themselves as either isolated or autonomous. Activism itself often highlights interdependence, while simultaneously empowering participants. Such a model of political engagement and social connection needs to find its way more directly into our analysis of citizenship and public policy.

The more one ponders the volumes under review here, the more one is convinced of the need to develop a new basis for a social and political community that enables respect and well-being for all its members. If these works do not yet provide us with a blueprint for achieving it, they offer important clues to the direction we ought take and make clear the importance of the task.

NOTES

I wish to thank members of the Smith College Project on Women and Social Change works-in-progress seminar, Donna Divine, and the editors of *Comparative Politics* for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

1. Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley, *Women and Public Policies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 8.

2. E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People* (New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1960); Michael Lipsky, "Protest as a Political Resource," *American Political Science Review*, 62 (December 1968), 1144–58; and Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: How They Succeed, Why They Fail* (New York: Pantheon, 1979).

3. Gelb and Palley, p. 11.

4. See also Mary Katzenstein, "Feminism within American Institutions," *Signs*, 16 (Autumn 1990), 27–54.

5. Gelb and Palley, p. 203.

6. Vivien Hart, "Watch What We Do: Women Administrators and the Implementation of Minimum Wage Policy, Washington, D.C., 1918–1923," and Catherine East, "Comment," both delivered to panel on "Women and Public Policy" at the Eighth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Douglass College, June 1990. In this claim, Hart takes explicit issue with the perspective of Kathy Ferguson, who argues that bureaucratic structures have a life of their own and allow little or no room for feminist (or other progressive) creativity or challenge. See Kathy Ferguson, *The Feminist Case against Bureaucracy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984).

7. Ellen Boneparth and Emily Stoper, eds., *Women, Power and Policy* (New York: Pergamon, 1988), p. 42.

8. Kathleen Staudt and Jane Jaquette, "Women's Programs, Bureaucratic Resistance, and Feminist Organizations," in Boneparth and Stoper, eds., p. 304.

9. Joyce Gelb, *Feminism and Politics*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 159.

10. Helga Hernes, "Women and the Welfare State: The Transition from Private to Public Dependence," in Ann Showstack Sassoon, eds., *Women and the State* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 77–78.

11. Gelb, p. 223.

12. Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives* (New York: Viking, 1988), pp. 28, 26, 24.

13. Margot Kempers and Paula Rayman, "The Meaning of Unemployment in the Lives of Women," in Lourdes Beneria and Catherine Stimpson, eds., *Women, Households and the Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 142–47.

14. See, for example, Susan Saegert, "Masculine Cities and Feminine Suburbs," *Signs*, 5 (Spring 1980), S96–111.

15. Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), and *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work and Family Life* (New York: Norton, 1984).

16. One of the first broad discussions of these issues may be found in *Feminist Studies*, 5 (Summer 1979), esp. essays by Rosalind Petchesky, Ann Corinne Hill, Vilma R. Hunt, Michael J. Wright, and Wendy Chavkin.
17. Dorothy McBride Stetson, *Women's Rights in the USA* (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole, 1991), p. 161.
18. In Boneparth and Stoper, eds., p. 126.
19. Huckle in Boneparth and Stoper, eds. pp. 131, 143. See also Jo Freeman, "From Protection to Equal Opportunity," in Louise Tilly and Patricia Gurin, eds., *Women, Politics and Change* (New York: Russell Sage, 1990), pp. 457–81.
20. Martha Minow, *Making All the Difference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), represents one important recent effort to reconceptualize the ways we address issues of equality and difference. See also Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
21. See Hernes; essays by Walzer and Krouse and McPherson in Amy Gutmann, ed., *Democracy and the Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); and an essay by Orloff in Margaret Weir, Ann Shola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
22. See, for example, Hilary Land, "Women: Supporters or Supported?," in Diana Leonard Barker and Sheila Allen, eds., *Sexual Divisions and Society: Process and Change* (London: Tavistock, 1976), pp. 108–32; and Eileen Boris and Peter Bardaglio, "The Transformation of Patriarchy: The Historic Role of the State," in Irene Diamond, ed., *Families, Politics and Public Policies* (New York: Longman, 1983), pp. 70–93.
23. See, for example, Barbara Nelson, "The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State," in Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), and "The Gender, Race, and Class Origins of Early Welfare Policy and the Welfare State," in Tilly and Gurin, eds.; also Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, "Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880–1920," *American Historical Review*, 95 (1990), 1076–1108. Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and the women of Hull House were instrumental in struggles around protective legislation and workplace regulations affecting women and children in Illinois, developing statutes that became models for legislation in that state and ultimately nationally. See Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Hull House in the 1890's: A Community of Women Reformers," *Signs*, 10 (1985), 658–77.
24. Barbara Nelson makes this point clearly in "The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State." See also Martha Ackelsberg, "Dependency, Resistance, and the Welfare State: Contribution and Limits of Feminist Theory," paper delivered at the Center for European Studies conference on Women and the Welfare State, Harvard University, April 1989.
25. Gwendolyn Mink, "The Lady and the Tramp: Gender, Race, and the Origins of the American Welfare State," in Gordon, ed., pp. 93, 97–9, 111–14; Nelson, "The Origins"; and Jane Jensen, "Representations of Gender: Policies to 'Protect' Women Workers and Infants in France and the United States before 1914," in Gordon, ed., esp. pp. 166–69.
26. Laura Balbo, "Crazy Quilts: Rethinking the Welfare State Debate from a Woman's Point of View," in Sassoon, ed. See also Cynthia Cockburn, *The Local State* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), Ida Susser, *Norman Street: Poverty and Politics in an Urban Neighborhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), and Ida Susser, "Working Class Women, Social Protest, and Changing Ideologies," in Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen, eds., *Women and the Politics of Empowerment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).
27. Michael Walzer, "Socializing the Welfare State," in Gutman, ed., p. 23. See also Carole Pateman, "The Patriarchal Welfare State," in *ibid.*, esp. pp. 248–9.
28. Hernes, pp. 76–86, quotation pp. 77–78.
29. See, for example, Jean Elstain, "Antigone's Daughters: Reflections on Female Identity and the State," in Irene Diamond, ed., *Families, Politics and Public Policies* (New York: Longman, 1983), pp. 300–311, and "Reclaiming the Socialist-Feminist Citizen," *Socialist Review*, 74 (1984), 21–27; Ferguson; Pateman; Mimi Abramowitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston: South End Press, 1988). For a summary of these arguments see Martha A. Ackelsberg and Irene Diamond, "Gender and Political Life," in Beth Hess and Myra Marx Ferree, eds., *Analyzing Gender: Social Science Perspectives* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1989), pp. 504–25.
30. Anette Borchorst and Birte Siim, "Women and the Advanced Welfare State," in Sassoon, ed., p. 146. There seems to be some analogy here with the debate (presented in Benería and Stimpson) between Bluestone and Kuhn and Sacks and Kessler-Harris, on the one hand, and Heidi Hartman, on the other, about the effects on women of the shift from an industrial to a service economy.
31. Francis Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), and *The New Class War* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); Linda Gordon, "What Does Welfare Regulate?," *Social Research*, 55

(Winter 1988), 609–630; and Piven and Cloward's response, "Welfare Doesn't Shore Up Traditional Family Roles: A Reply to Linda Gordon," *ibid.*, pp. 631–47.

32. Hermes, p. 82.

33. See also Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, *Abortion and Women's Choice*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990); Carol Joffe, *The Regulation of Sexuality: Experiences of Family Planning Workers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); and Zillah Eisenstein, "The Sexual Politics of the New Right," *Signs*, 7 (Spring 1982), 567–88, and "The Patriarchal Relations of the Reagan State," *Signs*, 10 (Winter 1984), 329–37.

34. Barbara Nelson, "Women's Poverty and Women's Citizenship: Some Political Consequences of Economic Marginality," *Signs*, 10 (Winter 1984), 209–31.

35. Especially Kuhn and Bluestone, Sacks and Kessler-Harris, Sarri, and Zinn in Benería and Stimpson, eds.; and, from a more historical perspective, Sapiro, Mink, and Nelson in Gordon.

36. Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen, eds., *Women and the Politics of Empowerment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988). For the political implications of these arguments, see Martha Ackelsberg, "Communities, Resistance, and Women's Activism: Some Implications for Democratic Theory," in *ibid.*, pp. 297–314. I am grateful to Phyllis Palmer for pointing out the connections between the essays in this volume and the questions discussed here.

37. In Gordon, ed., pp. 58, 63. See also Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*; Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873–1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981); Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona," *Signs*, 7 (Spring 1982), 545–67; and Paula Hyman, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest," *American Jewish History*, 70 (1980), 91–105.

38. Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics," in Gordon, ed., pp. 60, 72; see also Jensen, "Representations," p. 169.

39. Suzanne Lebsock, "Women and American Politics, 1880–1920," in Tilly and Gurin, eds., p. 55.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

41. Pateman, "The Patriarchal Welfare State," pp. 235–6.

42. See especially the essays by Stoper, Williams, and Huckle in Boneparth and Stoper, eds.; and by Nelson, Faue, Freeman, Jacob, Brill, and Klatch in Tilly and Gurin, eds.

43. Pateman, "The Patriarchal Welfare State," pp. 250–60; Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); see also Ackelsberg, "Dependency."

44. See Ackelsberg, "Communities in Resistance and Women's Activism," and also "Dependency."